

# The Twice Translated Tale: A Translation Evaluation of *Basanti*

UPAMA RANI  
UMESH KUMAR

## Abstract

*Basanti* (1980), a novel by Bhisham Sahni is one of the most significant yet underappreciated literary works in Hindi. Through its titular character, it fittingly brings to life the struggles and predicament of India's lower working class, focusing, particularly, on the plight of women in the workforce. The novel was first translated into English by Jaidev in 1997. Nearly two decades later, Shveta Sarda produced another English version in 2016. While both translations effectively capture the spirit of the Hindi original, they diverge significantly in their approaches and methodologies in terms of translation choices. Consequently, the article undertakes an in-depth comparative study of the two translated versions of *Basanti*. The exercise not only helps in exploring the complexities of translation and retranslation practices in contemporary India but also entails how varying approaches and motives can influence the translation of a literary work.

**Keywords:** Hindi Literature, Hindi Literature in Translation, Bhisham Sahni, Politics of Retranslation, Retranslation Hypothesis.

## Introduction

Retranslation has a rich historical lineage stretching back centuries across cultures. Nonetheless, the systematic study of the phenomenon is a very recent development. It was not until the past two decades that an increasing number of scholars in the field of translation studies started to examine the phenomenon of retranslation from varied standpoints. While the term 'retranslation' generally implies the idea of the availability of multiple translations of a single source text, there have been numerous endeavors to define and refine its theoretical conceptualizations over time. For

instance, Andrew Chesterman (2000) defines retranslation as “situations where there is more than one translation, in the same target language, of a given source text” (as cited in Tian, 2017). On the other hand, for Sebnem Susam-Sarajeva (2003), retranslation refers to the subsequent translations of a text or part of a text, carried out after the initial translation that introduced this text to the same target language (p. 2). Using the identical premise, Koskinen and Paloposki (2010) argue that retranslation (as a product) denotes a second or later translation of a single source text into the same target language, whereas retranslation (as a process) is thus prototypically a phenomenon that occurs over a period of time, but in practice, simultaneous or near-simultaneous translations also exist (p. 294).

Setting aside the above-established definitions, what is more crucial to understand is the specific need/context that demands a retranslation exercise. The much debatable ‘Retranslation Hypothesis’ emerged from the articles authored by Antoine Berman and Paul Bensimon in the French journal *Palimpsests* in the year 1990. Berman contends that the translation of literary texts is an “incomplete act” in itself and only through retranslations can it achieve completion, which, according to him, meant coming close to the source text (George & Das, 2023). He highlights that the initial translations are marked by ‘la defaillance’ or ‘shortcomings’, which can be counteracted by “the restorative, corrective and illuminating properties of retranslation” (Deane-Cox, 2016, p.3). Historical skepticism regarding translation, deeply rooted in the perception of translators as traitors, translation as a derivative act, and an act of treason, among others, might have played its role in the formation of this hypothesis.

Further, a different interpretation of the source text could bring out a plurality of meanings in the source text itself. Gayatri C. Spivak in her 1992 essay *Politics of Translation*, calls translation “the most intimate act of reading” (p.178). This ‘reading’ is more affected by the reader’s response to the literary work than the original intentions of the author at the time of its creation. Thus, ‘reading’ inevitably would vary from person to person and so will the interpretations. Harold Bloom’s theory that ‘all reading is a misreading’ again leads us to question the assumptions that “there is

a single way, a most correct way, or the best way to translate” (Collins, 2017). When one familiarizes himself with the underpinning and possibilities discussed above, there remains little doubt that the multiple translations of a single literary work should not be a luxury but a necessity. Premchand, in his presidential address to the first conference of the Progressive Writers’ Association (1936) also corroborates that literature is “the criticism of life” and the language used in it “is a means, not an end” (Orsini, 2004). In that speech, he also says “the same event or situation does not leave the same impression on everyone. Every person has a different mentality and point of view” (ibid). Here it seems that he is explaining why there should be more than one translator of any work (Gautam, 2012, p. 35). Thus, the need for retranslation is paramount for capturing the diverse interpretations and nuanced meanings inherent in any literary text. An array of translations enriches our understanding, ensuring that literature remains a vibrant and multifaceted exploration of human experience.

Furthermore, the existing translation (target text) may well be considered outdated due to the shifts in linguistic and stylistic norms, contextual shifts such as social, political, cultural, and ideological, of not only text production but also text reception. Retranslations, as Siobhan Brownlie (2006) observes, are undertaken because there has been a change in ideologies and/or norms in the initiating culture (usually the target culture), and the translation is thought to have aged or is unacceptable because it no longer conforms to the current ways of thinking or behaving.

The act of translation and subsequent retranslation serves a distinct function or purpose to fill in the target language and this function can be executed by the publisher. While examining the reasons behind (re)translation, translation theorists have scrutinized instances where the publisher assumes a pivotal role. This includes scenarios in which the publisher anticipates that the target text could present a fresh interpretation of the source text or cater to a specific propaganda or readership (Gurcaglar, 2008, p.235). Factors such as editing, printing, advertising, sales of the retranslation, and even the selection of the text for retranslation or that of the translator can impact the decision (Tian, 2017, p.7).

Taking a cue from the formulations previously stated, this paper aims to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the dual translations of Bhisham Sahni's Hindi novel *Basanti*, rendered into English by two different translators: Jaidev and Shveta Sarda. We seek to ask the following questions during our discussion:

- a) How do the two translations differ from each other in terms of their rendering of the source text?
- b) What translation strategies and methodologies have been used by the respective translators in their renderings?
- c) What are the motivations and purposes behind the translators' decision to undertake this particular text for translation?

At the same time, it must be stated that in the context of this paper, literalness to the original Hindi is the parameter by which the comparative evaluation of the two English translations is made. A certain degree of translation authenticity is possible when translations are uncompromisingly literal. We are aware that contemporary translation theory encourages serious debates on the political and subjective agency of the translator so much so that the translators -at times do not shy away from displaying a fascination for 'transcreation' and the resultant 'freedom' it brings to the very act of translation. However, for us literal is not just to the words of the original but also to the context, tonality, situations, dialogues, mode of narration, etc.

## **Sahni, *Basanti* and the Two Translations: A Brief Overview**

Bhisham Sahni (1915-2003) was one of the most distinguished and celebrated writers of post-independent India, known for his indomitable dedication to India's pluralistic ethos and secular foundations. While he was also known for being a professor, essayist, translator, editor, playwright, theater director, actor, and social and political activist, it is his fictional writing that has made the most significant contribution to Hindi literature. The eminent Hindi writer Kamleshwar Prasad Saxena, in Sahni's appraisal, claims:

“Bhisham Sahni’s name is etched so deeply into the twentieth century of Hindi literature that it cannot be erased. With Independence and till the 11th July 2003 (*his death*), this name has been synonymous with Hindi story and playwriting. Bhisham Sahni had gained such an unmatched popularity that all kinds of readers awaited his new creations and each and every word of his was read. There was no need to ask a general reader if he had read this or that writing by Bhisham. It was possible to begin a sudden discussion on his stories or novels. Such a rare readerly privilege was either available to Premchand or, after Harishankar Parsai, to Bhisham Sahni. This too is rare that the fame he received from Hindi should, during his lifetime, become the fame for Hindi itself”.<sup>1</sup>

Seeing the worth and popularity of Sahni’s work, many of his works began to arrive in translation. For instance, Penguin India, while commemorating Sahni’s birth centenary, brought out the following classics in English translation: *Tamas*, *Boyhood*, *Basanti*, and *Mansion*. However, our discussion would be limited to the translation of *Basanti* only.

Jaidev did the first translation of *Basanti* in English in the year 1997. Thereafter Shveta Sarda attempted a new version for Penguin in 2016 –after a gap of almost two decades. Typically, when a text is retranslated, a certain rationale behind its production is provided. The most common assumption that rules retranslation is the identification of a certain degree of inadequacy in the existing translation. It is not uncommon to see publishers and translators, at times both, providing reasons for retranslation. Strangely though, Shveta Sarda’s motivation to retranslate *Basanti* is missing, she has not provided any introduction or translator’s note in the 2016 English version of *Basanti*. The only plausible inference one can draw is that the translator is commissioned by Penguin India, and the translation will add value to Sahni’s centenary celebrations. The absence of an introductory note, context, translator’s preface and glossary, etc. is more a handicap for the reader than a facility. On the other hand, Jaidev’s translation, in contrast, was part of a broader project aimed at establishing a Centre for the Study of Indian Civilization. The primary objective of this initiative was to publish a

multi-volume series of books featuring some of the most exceptional creative texts produced in the Indian Subcontinent. Unlike Sarda's translation, Jaidev's rendition incorporates heavy traffic of para-text around the translation. It includes a foreword by Mrinal Miri that elucidates the purpose behind the translation. It is followed by an introduction by Jaidev that accounts for the life and times of Bhisham Sahni. Jaidev, the translator, also provides a translator's note that he calls "a confession". In this note, he candidly acknowledges the difficulties encountered during the translation, how he navigated them, and the inherent limitations that might have plagued the translation. He confesses, "Many are the pleasures of translation but none of them comes unalloyed with guilt, with a sense of transgression" (xvii), effectively conveying the complexities and dilemmas inherent in the very act of translation. At the end, it also provides a glossary of Hindi words.

Both the translations are successful in bringing out the essence of the Hindi original. However, they also exhibit significant disparities in their approaches. These differences could be attributed to varying methods of 'reading' or interpreting the source text, distinctive writing styles, the extensive vocabulary available in the target language i.e. English, and most crucially, the motives driving the individual translations. A detailed comparison of both translations will help our cause.

## **Two English Translations of *Basanti*: A Comparative Translation Analysis**

It will be in the fitness of things to start our translation evaluation from the very evaluation of the cover pages of the translated texts. The cover page serves as the initial interface between the source text and the target text. Although not extensively explored in translation studies, the cover page of a translated text can be considered a form of 'intersemiotic translation' (Loddo, et al., 2022). In his work "Re-Covered Rose: A Case Study in Book Cover Design as Intersemiotic Translation", Marco Sonzogni (2011) posits that when a reader picks up a book, the essence of the text has been translated into the visual realm of the cover. Using Umberto Eco's bestseller, *The Name of the Rose* as a case study, Sonzogni's research is the first to examine

book cover design as a form of intersemiotic translation, highlighting the purposeful selection of visual signs to represent verbal signs. He further argues that as an act of translation, the cover of a book should be an ‘equivalent representation’ of the text. Consequently, cover pages can provide psychological access to the approach and mindset of the translator, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the translated work.

Returning to *Basanti*, one finds a conspicuous distinction amongst the cover pages of the three texts, promoting thereby, the initial point of translation critique. The choices exercised in the selection of cover pages also display the writer and translator’s approach in executing their creative endeavors.

Sahni’s original cover page, as shown in Figure 1, consists of a free-hand drawing of a bright yellow and green coloured picture of a city in contrast with the colorless (white) picture of the ‘basti’. The portrayal of Basanti is romanticized combining yellow, green, and white colors, showing her mixed adherence or adjustment to both ways of living. A cheerful smile on her face represents her spirit to fight the odds. The picture amply brings out the hard-to-ignore rural-urban divide that the novel portrays.

On the other hand, the translation cover page of Jaidev’s rendition, as shown in Figure 2, is rough, dull, and dark in color. It also spots the sketches of a man and a woman loading their belongings in a truck. This color code symbolically matches the life and hardships that the main characters are bound to face in the novel. Their sad expressions demonstrate the backdrop of the demolition of their homes, their ‘basti’, and how the situation has compelled them to move out of the place they called home. The cover page categorically mentions ‘Writing from the Indian Subcontinent’ indicating the very purpose of selecting this text for translation. The font of the title *Basanti* is also differently styled, mixed with four uppercase and three lowercase alphabets and a red coloured ‘bindi’ as a title on ‘I’ –symbolizing femininity can be clearly noticed.

The cover page of Sarda’s translation, as shown in Figure 3, depicts a feminine hair palette decorated with dark pink (to the extent of looking red) ribbons. The hair palette has a bright blue background to go with. The pictorial choice and the color

combinations represent the attitude and fighting spirit of Basanti to fight the hardships of her life. An improvisation on the hair palette – an instance of owning a female body part, provides an assertive stance to Basanti's character.

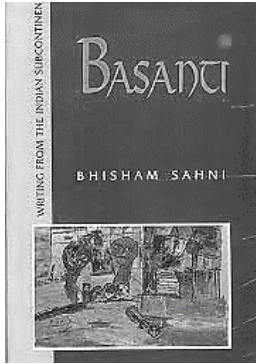
**Figure 1**

*Cover Page of  
the Source Text*



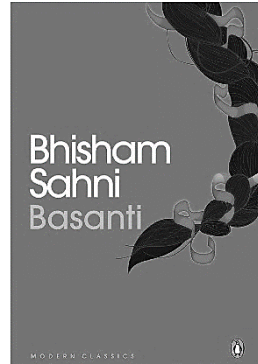
**Figure 2**

*Cover Page of  
Jaidev's Translation*



**Figure 3**

*Cover Page of  
Sarda's Translation*



*Note.* These three images depict the cover pages of *Basanti* as presented in the source text and the two translated versions.

While focusing exclusively on the translated cover pages of *Basanti*, it is not hard to see a disjunction there. Whereas Jaidev's choice is focused on the collective suffering and hardships faced by the underprivileged class, Sarda's effort rallies towards creating an individualized identity for Basanti. Speaking otherwise, the two cover pages can be clubbed into collective vs. individual debate, political vs. personal debate. Jaidev's cover page depicts India, more particularly Delhi, as a geography of desperation. This desperation signals the absence of political and economic freedom for the majority of her people. The cover page aids in reading the novel as a national allegory, more because its setting is Delhi –India's national capital. Further, the depiction of dehumanized faces on the cover page by Jaidev directs how in pursuit of relentless expansion, metropolises like Delhi suck the labor and lives of people whom it eventually discards as dirt to the designated basti. On the other hand, the choice of Sarda's cover page is more inclined towards the



celebration of the individual. In fact, this celebration of the individual is at the core of Sahni's conceptualization in the original Hindi. Though destined to live in the most hostile conditions –both mentally and physically, Sahni wants to focus on Basanti's indomitable spirit. According to him, the novel here “depicts a character in Basanti who outgrows her reality and destiny both. And she continues to outgrow... [ ] she rebels against her family, context and the traditional morality” (Sahni, 2022, blurb). Speaking otherwise, Sarda's translation choice concerning the cover is inclined towards Sahni's overall vision for the novel.

Moving on to the textual analysis of the two translated texts, it becomes evident that they differ significantly in their approaches. Lawrence Venuti's (1995) concept of domestication and foreignization offers a framework for analyzing the translation strategies employed in literary texts. According to Venuti, domestication involves making the foreign text more familiar to the target audience by aligning it with their cultural values, thereby bringing the author's voice closer to the target language. On the other hand, foreignization involves deliberately preserving elements of the source text's language and culture to highlight its differences, transporting the reader to an unfamiliar context. In simpler terms, domestication adapts the source text to fit the linguistic and cultural norms of the target audience, while foreignization retains aspects of the source text's language and culture.

At the same time, the translation strategies of domestication and foreignization also form a significant topic of discussion within the framework of the Retranslation Hypothesis. Chuanmao Tian (2017), a Chinese scholar in his paper “Retranslation Theories: A Critical Perspective” discusses theoretical perspectives aiming to uncover tendencies or universals in retranslation. For instance, he references Bensimon (1990) who claims that:

“Since the initial translation already introduced the foreign text to target readers, the retranslator no longer seeks to close the distance between the two cultures. S/he does not refuse the cultural displacement, but rather strives to create it. After a reasonably long period following the initial translation, the

reader is finally able to receive and perceive the work in the irreducible foreignness and exoticism. Compared to the introduction-translation or the acclimatising translation, retranslation is usually more attentive to the letter of the source text, its linguistic and stylistic profile, and its singularity” (p.4).

Tian also cites Gambier (1994), who expresses a similar view, by stating “a first translation always tends to be more assimilating, tends to reduce the otherness in the name of cultural or editorial requirements...The retranslation, in this perspective, would mark *a return* to the source-text” (p.4). Thus, both these arguments imply that the first translation is more domesticating than the retranslation(s). However, recent empirical studies have questioned the above-stated conjecture. Koskinen and Plaposki’s (2004) collaborative work suggests that the “Retranslation Hypothesis may apply during an initial stage in the development of a literature but not to all first individual translations: domesticating first translations may be the feature of a phase in a literature, not of translation in general” (p.30). Similarly, in 2009, Desmidt’s case study of 52 German and 18 Dutch versions of a children’s classic book also concludes that the retranslation hypothesis does not have general validity but it may be valid up to some extent if it is not formulated in absolute terms (Tian, 2017, p.5).

Likewise, this dichotomy of domestication and foreignization, propounded by the early Retranslation Hypothesis theorists by the names of Bensimon and Gambier fails to hold in the case of the two translations of Basanti as well. This is because Jaidev’s initial translation leans more towards foreignization, while Sarda’s retranslation is more towards domesticating. A close analysis of these translations reveals that Jaidev has preserved many essential Hindi words in his rendition. For instance, the household terms such as ‘chauka-bartan’ for ‘चौका बर्तन’ and ‘chullah’ for ‘चूल्हा’, remain unchanged in his translations. In his translator’s note, he elucidates the ideological standpoint and the linguistic approaches guiding his choices. For example, he justifies retaining the term ‘chauka-bartan’, arguing that it is “not simply washing or performing household chores, let alone handling the kitchen work” (xviii) and the word has no English equivalent. In contrast, Sarda translates ‘चौका बर्तन’ as

‘day of work’ and ‘चूल्हा’ as ‘clay stoves’ in her version. Similarly, Hindi terms like ‘ढाबा’, ‘चबूतरा’, ‘खोखा’, ‘पंडित’, ‘काजल’, and ‘हुज़ूर’, among others, find their place in Jaidev’s rendition as they occur in the original. However, these terms are domesticated in Sarda’s translation as ‘eatery’, ‘a raised platform’, ‘kiosk’, ‘priest’, ‘kohl’, and ‘sir’, respectively, making them easily comprehensible to English-speaking readers. Sartorial choices such as ‘अंगरखा’ and ‘घाघरा’ are also retained in Jaidev’s translation as they occur but appear as ‘overflowing frock-shirts’ and ‘ladies’ long skirt’ in Sarda’s translation respectively. Jaidev even retains the Hindi slang term ‘हरामज़ादी’ as ‘haramzadi’ in several instances while Sarda translates it as ‘wretch’.

It needs to be mentioned that the Retranslation Hypothesis also attempts to approach the nature of retranslation from two perspectives: cultural orientation and translation quality. It posits that initial translations tend to be target-culture-based i.e. domesticating while subsequent ones tend to be source-culture-based i.e. foreignizing (Tian, 2017, pp. 4-5). However, in the case of *Basanti*, we observe a reversal of this pattern, the initial translation by Jaidev is more foreignizing than the retranslation by Sarda. In fact, Jaidev’s translation leans so heavily towards foreignizing, retaining numerous Hindi words that could have been easily translated into English, that it has affected the translation quality. For instance, the Hindi words like ‘pundit’, ‘Bhagwanji’, ‘beta’, ‘Rani’, and ‘dhobi’ could have been easily translated as ‘priest’, ‘God’, ‘son’, ‘queen’, and ‘washerman’ as done by Sarda in her translation.

Jaidev’s translation also contains inaccuracies and misinterpretations, leading to omissions or additions that deviate from the original text. Take this for an example:

Sahni (original): “नहीं, बाहा धोबी और धोबिन बैठे हैं। तुम्हे पहचान लेंगे।” (p.50).

Jaidev (translation): “Your **dhobi Chacha** and **his wife** are there, they’ll recognize you” (p.44).

Here Jaidev creates a fictional relationship between Basanti and the washerman couple and this continues even in succeeding paragraphs. Jaidev's translation creates a kind of semantic surplus, which at times deviates from the primary intentions of the author. Sarda's translation, on the other hand, aligns better with the original: "No, the **washer**man and **his wife** are sitting there. They know you" (Sarda, 2016, p.57).

Besides, Jaidev in his translation has also inserted a few Hindi words like 'baqwas', which is not even present in the original text. It is baffling to note that the translator has used the word 'baqwas' many a time in his translation: "And when I returned fagged out, I am made to take such **baqwas** by our panchayat chief. The plan is cleared; the lanes are to be laid out. All **baqwas**!" (Jaidev, 1997, p.63). Here again, Sarda's translation maintains clarity and often provides direct references to the original text by italicizing when necessary: "And then come back exhausted to listen to this shit. *The map is awaiting clearance. Roads will be built*" (Sarda, 2016, p.82). One can notice how Jaidev's translation disrupts the flow when compared with the original work: "अब थके-हारे लौटे है तो इसकी लंतरानियाँ सुनो। नक्शा पास हो रहा है सड़क बन रही है..." (p.72).

At this juncture, it will not be difficult to argue that incorrect or awkward English mars Jaidev's translation. The phrases or sentences like '...Bibi returns after ta-ta on the stairs' (p.134), and 'Now, you'll sprinkle some red powder along my hair parting. You have something red down there?' (p.60), etc. not only hampers readability but lets down the spirit of the original text. The inappropriate use of English is also evident when he pluralizes the Hindi word 'dadi' (*paternal grandmother*) by adding 's' to it: "Bahinji, here is my grandson Subhash. Beta, speak out your name. Tell your name to these **Dadis** here" (p.129).

Furthermore, Jaidev's translation occasionally amplifies pathos, making situations melodramatic. Sarda's version remains close to the original text, avoiding exaggerated emotional tones. A good example occurs when a few people from 'basti' approach the government officials, requesting not to demolish their houses. Jaidev translates it as: "Huzoor, we masons spend our lives building homes for others. Why should we be denied a roof over our heads? Is that

your justice? Rains are upon us, Huzoor. Do not force us out of our basti. Where will we go at such a time?” (Jaidev, 1997, p.2). While, Sarda renders the same situation thus: “Sir, we are masons. We make houses for people, and today there’s uncertainty about our own houses. It’s thanks to us that people have shelters, and now we are in danger of losing the roofs over our heads. Don’t make us homeless in the rains” (Sarda, 2016, p.2). Sarda’s translation maintains a close fidelity to the tonality of the Hindi original that reads thus: “मालिक, हम राज-मिस्त्री, हम ही घर बनावे और हमारा ही रहने का ठिकाना नहीं। लोगों का घर जुटावे और अपना सर छिपाने के लिए जगह नहीं। इस मेह-बरसात में तो हमे बेघर नहीं करो...” (p.8).

Jaidev’s (unnecessary) extrapolation: “Is that your justice?” should not be termed as another instance of semantic surplus. On the contrary, the insertion hints towards a much deeper consideration at play. The choice of the above phrase gets a new dimension when we recollect that Jaidev’s translation was, in fact, part of a larger project aimed at establishing a Centre for the Study of Indian Civilization, which sought to compile an anthology addressing critical literary, social, moral, and political issues relevant to the subcontinent’s civilizational destiny. With such an agenda guiding his translation efforts, Jaidev was naturally inclined towards the source text as a repository of struggles and discrimination faced by working-class communities, thereby emphasizing pathos and empathy to amplify the narrative significance.

The novel’s protagonist Basanti consistently emerges as a resilient figure. It is crucial how Sahni unveils her multifaceted nature, portraying her as ‘the girl-mother, the girl-drifter and the girl-victim’, interwoven with striking ironies. Her laughter remains innocent, befitting her tender age of not even fourteen, but it takes on a desperate and cynical tone during phases of disenchantment with her lover, middle-class patrons, and even her father. She eventually transcends this dark, fatalistic phase, reclaiming her laughter, albeit fleetingly. Basanti surprises readers with her heroic refusal to succumb to her circumstances. From a translation perspective, thus, preserving the essence of Sahni’s portrayal of Basanti demands meticulous attention. A close examination of the

gender dynamics and language used while translating the protagonist reveals a host of translation choices.

In the original Hindi, Sahni often implies rather than explicitly states certain aspects of Basanti's character. Quite strangely though, Jaidev's translation tends to overtly insert these implicit elements. For instance, in Chapter Six, when Basanti realizes that Deenu has married her primarily for sexual gratification and confines her to a small room, Jaidev translates the narration thus: "Deenu pulled her into his arms. Basanti liked it whenever he held her in his arms, but at this moment she did not want sex: 'No, I want to talk with you. I spend the whole day in silence. There is no one here to talk to me' (Jaidev, 1997, p.73). One can see that in the original there is no (direct) mention of the word 'sex', although it is implicit. See for instance the actual reporting by Sahni: "दीनू ने उसे अपनी ओर खींच लिया। बसंती को अच्छा लगा। पर वो दीनू की बाहों से निकलने की कोशिश करते हुए बोली 'पहले मेरे साथ बातें करा। मैं दिन-भर गुम-सुम पड़ी रहती हूँ। कोई बात करने वाला नहीं'..." (p.81). In his translation, Jaidev seems to have bypassed the original. By inserting the word 'sex', the translator has hyper-sexualized Basanti. Though just a single word, it has converted Basanti's mental need into sexual desperation! The translator's choice is a significant diversion from the original, both in spirit and intention. At this juncture, it will be of interest to ponder over the gendered aspect of such a choice. In other words, what would have been the choice had the same situation been rendered by a woman translator? Sarda's translation provides an answer. One can observe that she closely adheres to the original without any improvisation: "Dinu<sup>2</sup> pulled her close. Basanti liked that. But she tried to wrestle herself out of his arm. 'First, I want to talk to you. I've had no one to talk to all day'" (Sarda, 2016, p.94).

Furthermore, when Deenu's demeanor turns crude and lustful, Basanti remarks: "That's not how you speak with the **woman** you've married" (Jaidev, 1997, p.76). Here, Jaidev intervenes with a feminist perspective by using the word 'woman' which is absent in the original: "जिसके साथ ब्याह किया हो, उसके साथ ऐसा नहीं बोलते" (p. 83). However, this could be an instance of feminist translational activity wherein a deliberate intervention is made to unveil the

gendered discourse implicit in the text and make it more pronounced for the reader (George & Das, 2023). Jaidev's conscious choice in his rendering is also suggestive of the idea of translation as rewriting where, as Eleanora Federici (2011) remarks that the visible translator is faithful to her reading of the source text, her understanding of the author and her capability as an interpreter of words. Jaidev's translation, therefore, not only conveys the literal meaning but also enhances the feminist undertones, emphasizing the respect and recognition due to women in marital relationships. In contrast, Sarda's translation, "That's not how you speak with the **one** you've married" (Sarda, 2016, p.97) aligns closely with the literal meaning of the original text. This approach maintains the original's neutrality and does not introduce additional interpretive layers. Sarda's choice reflects a different translation strategy -one that prioritizes closeness to the source text's exact wording over interpretive interventions.

The differing approaches between Jaidev and Sarda highlight a broader debate in translation studies: the balance between literalness to the source text and the translator's interpretive voice. Jaidev's feminist perspective adds a layer of gender awareness, making the text resonate with the feminist discourse. In contrast, Sarda's literal translation maintains the original's simplicity and neutrality, leaving the interpretation to the reader. While both these approaches have their merits, Jaidev's feminist intervention enriches the text by bringing implicit gender structure to the forefront, illustrating the significance of gender sensitivity in translation.

Jaidev's tendency to inject sexual or gendered undertones into neutral sentences or words continues, as seen in Chapter Eleven, where he translates one of the sentences as: "Basanti carried her **son** in her arms" (Jaidev, 1997, p.123), whereas the original reads "बच्चे को गोद में उठाये, बसंती..." (p.131). Sarda avoids this deviation, rendering the sentence as "Basanti carried her **child**..." (Sarda, 2016, p.156). What are the reasons for Jaidev's obsession with a male child? One wonders. Examples such as these imply that Jaidev's translation tends to introduce explicit sexual/gendered references deviating substantially from the original text, while Sarda's translation closely preserves the subtlety and essence of the

original. She follows the unofficial dictum of a ‘good’ translation i.e. to reach very close to the original text.

As a result, it is pertinent for us to theorize Sarda’s ‘success’ in the retranslation of *Basanti*. Antoine Berman, one of the earliest proponents of the Retranslation Hypothesis also argues for the need of an ontological cause for the existence of retranslations. In other words, he considers retranslation as a potent weapon in addressing the diminishing failures (*la defaillance*) of the initial translation. This holds true even in the case of the two translations of *Basanti*. The initial translation undertaken by Jaidev, as has been evidenced in the preceding paragraphs, falls short in terms of accuracy, quality, and literalness of the original text. It includes absurd or incorrect English and excessive interference. Whereas, Sarda’s retranslation demonstrates better accountability to the original text, producing a more accurate and readable rendition. This could be attributed to the notion that, as Stewart (2009) points out, the new translations enjoy advantages that old ones do not have: retranslations after the first translations will more or less receive benefits from old translations.

However, this is not to argue that Jaidev has completely failed in his translation of *Basanti*. In a few instances, Jaidev seems to demonstrate a comparatively better understanding of the text than Sarda. For instance, the term ‘basti’ holds significant importance in the novel and is a recurrent metaphor in the original. Jaidev appropriately emphasizes this term in his translation. Conversely, Sarda minimizes, to the extent of demeaning, its significance. She introduces the word for the first time only on page number three, after either avoiding its use or substituting it with words like ‘neighborhood’. Before its introduction in Sarda’s translation, the term ‘basti’ is mentioned five times in the original, whereas Jaidev employs it excessively, using it eleven times! In both the renderings, however, the translators have failed to decode the capital of the word ‘basti’. This could well have been the reason due to which either the translators have underplayed the word or overplayed it. What was, in fact, required –a very precise and accurate frequency of the word in translation too. Needless to say, a novel that boasts itself as a working-class novel; the word ‘basti’ is a crucial term of reference, having a strong sentimental symbolism with the proletariat.



Caste was another important and complex term of reference in the novel, requiring careful handling from the translators. See for instance, a moment in Sarda's rendering: "No one paid Chaudhary any attention. Even though he'd been living here for years, he was still considered an outsider because of his **caste**" (Sarda, 2016, p.3). And now, Jaidev's translation: "None of the men paid him any attention. Although Chaudhri had lived in the basti for a number of years, he was still regarded as a **low-caste** outside" (Jaidev, 1997, p.2). In this case, Jaidev's rendering is accurate and aligns well with the original. This is how Sahni has conceived the moment in the original: "बरसो से इस बस्ती के छोर पर रहने के बावजूद उसे अभी भी बाहर का, छोटी-जात का आदमी ही माना जाता था" (p.8).

At the same time, many crucial terms and references attributed to the source culture of the text are either omitted or replaced in Sarda's translation. For instance, in a scene where Basanti's father, Chaudhari, is negotiating to sell Basanti to the old lame tailor, Bulakhi Ram, in the name of marriage, Bulakhi refers to Basanti as his Goddess Lakshmi. Jaidev's translation maintains this reference: "Chaudhary, you should be more concerned with things at your own end. So far as I'm concerned, I'm always ready to welcome Goddess Lakshmi in my home" (p.9). However, Sarda replaces "Goddess Lakshmi" with "bride" in her translation: "You put your house in order, Chaudhary. I'll do whatever it takes to bring my bride home..." (Sarda, 2016, p.11). Interestingly, after two pages i.e. on page 13, Sarda uses "goddess of wealth" for Basanti, perhaps indicating her later realization of the significance of the word in the novel's context.

Closely aligned to what is discussed above, there is yet another episode in the novel, depicting Deenu and Basanti crossing each other's path after the latter is abandoned by the former. When Deenu re-encounters Basanti living with the old lame tailor, Sahni reports: "...और पीछे-पीछे बसंती, सीता मईया की तरह चुपचाप आ रही थी उसे अपनी आँखों पर यकीं नहीं हुआ।" (p.138). Jaidev translates: "He was surprised to see Basanti following the fool like Sita Maiya. It was incredible" (Jaidev, 1997, p.130). Sarda, on the other hand, completely abandons the cultural reference to Mother Sita with

“good wife”: “He noticed that Basanti was walking behind him obediently, like a good wife. He wouldn’t have believed it if he hadn’t seen it with his own eyes” (Sarda, 2016, p.165).

Sarda’s translation choice seems to simplify or overlook the cultural nuances present in the original depiction. Replacing “Goddess Lakshmi” with “bride” and “Sita Maiya” with “good wife” steals the depth and meaning associated with these cultural references. Also, the substitution in translation can significantly impact the portrayal and characterization of individuals. By replacing culturally significant terms, there may be a loss of the original character’s depth and complexity. In yet another instance, Sahni’s text features numerous Hindi songs sung by Basanti, giving metonymic shades to her persona and mental state. Jaidev’s translation preserves these songs, providing English subtitles as well. However, though Sarda retains the Hindi songs in italics, she fails to provide the English translations. The choice defies logic. The deletion will pose a major challenge to the non-Hindi readers in understanding the psyche of Basanti. On the other hand, Jaidev’s choice of providing English translations alongside the Hindi songs enhances accessibility for readers who do not understand the original. This also ensures that the emotional depth conveyed through the songs is not lost out on the non-Hindi readers.

## Conclusion

All in all, what comes out from the discussion of select instances from the novel is that there is no definite way by which a literary text can be conveyed in translation in toto. Translating a literary text is a complex enterprise and demands meticulous attention to detail, unswerving dedication, and an intense understanding of the essence of the source text. Moreover, the process of translation and subsequent retranslation is shaped not only by the translator’s decisions regarding linguistic choices, gender-related aspects, interpreting desires and as such but also by external factors such as its motivation and purpose, the role of publishers, to name a few.

These translation choices and the resultant differences are also evident in the two translations of *Basanti*. Although, both these translations are quite successful in bringing out the essence of the

original Hindi text, they also exhibit significant disparities. Jaidev's translation employs strategies of foreignization, while Shveta Sarda adopts domestication. We have seen that Jaidev's heavy reliance on foreignizing strategies, such as retaining numerous untranslated Hindi words (whose English equivalence can easily be found), impacts the translation quality.

It must be reiterated that no single translation can be considered perfect, as different translations entail their own set of possibilities and limitations, gains and losses. On the one hand, Jaidev's translation effectively captures the core theme of the text, depicting the hardships faced by the marginalized, including Basanti's struggles against decay and exploitation. However, his numerous alterations, whether through omission or addition, tend to distance his translation from the original text. Additionally, linguistic inaccuracies in Jaidev's translation may impede smooth readability.

On the other hand, Sarda's translation prioritizes a more literal rendition, staying closer to the original text. However, this approach may sometimes lead to a lack of the original's colloquial charm, with Sarda occasionally disregarding or underplaying culturally significant words from the source text or eliminating the Hindi songs in her translation. This tendency could be attributed to time constraints, as Sarda was commissioned to translate not only *Basanti* but also another work by Sahni, *Mansion*, as part of the same project by Penguin India commemorating Sahni's birth centenary. The hurried nature of Sarda's translation might have contributed to such oversights or neglect.

Nevertheless, both translations offer profound reading experiences and serve as valuable pedagogical resources for learners of linguistics and translation studies. Despite their respective shortcomings, they contribute to the broader understanding and appreciation of Bhisham Sahni's work, enriching the available discourse on themes of social justice and marginalization within Indian literature.

## Endnotes:

1. The Light Shall Shine On. Outlookindia.com. Translated from Outlook Saptahik, 20 July 2023.
2. Readers will find an inconsistency in how the character Deenu is spelled in the article. Jaidev spells the character as ‘Deenu’, while Sarda has spelled it as ‘Dinu’. We have adhered to these spellings while quoting directly from the translators’ respective translations. However, during general discussion, we have used ‘Deenu’ to avoid any confusion.

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## About the Authors

### Upama Rani

Upama Rani is a Doctoral Research scholar affiliated with the Department of English at Banaras Hindu University. Her dissertation focuses on examining the construction of childhood in select Hindi texts. Her academic interests include children's literature, Hindi literature, and Translation Studies.

Email: upama[AT]bhu[DOT]ac[DOT]in

**Umesh Kumar**

Umesh Kumar is a translator and literary critic. He has been teaching English literature at Banaras Hindu University since 2015.

Email: umeshkumareng[AT]bhu[DOT]ac[DOT]in

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