
**The Dialectics of Human Intellection
and the Semiotics of Translation: A
Comparative Reading of Rabindranath Tagore's
Kar, akuntā sambāda
in Bangla and English**

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Abstract

*The paper attempts to examine certain key issues addressed by the theoretical corpus of writings on the 'translation paradox' by engaging in a semiotic reading of Tagore's *Kar, akuntā sambāda* written originally in Bengali and translated by the poet into English for a wider audience. Aware of the difficulties involved, the poet himself admits in a letter to Ajit Kumar Chakravarti (13 March 1913) written from Illinois, USA: 'What I try to capture in my English translation is the heart and core of my original Bengali. That is bound to make for a fairly wide deviation. If I were not there to help you out, you might probably find it impossible to identify the original in translation.' (Translated by Kshitish Ray, *Jadavpur Journal of Comparative Literature*, Vol. 9, P. 124). The question of the authenticity of a translation was the chief concern in early translation studies and no matter what position we might be taking now, it continues to concern translation scholars. The cultural and linguistic*

contours of different communities at different historical conjunctures make the act of translation a very challenging task not only to the scholar engaged in the process but also to the outsider to the domain as it reveals, within the process, the dialectics of human intellection.

I. Introduction

The domain of Translation Studies focuses on a whole range of theoretical issues that engage scholars in the academia. An ideological discourse leads one to focus on the dialectics of the twin forces of hegemonization and disempowerment on the one hand and resistance on the other. The complexity arises due to the operation of not only binary categories but several collateral forces that are continuously at work in a given ideological field. The goal of this disquisition is a micro-level comparative analysis of a literary artefact which was written by one of the first generation Indian English writers who, their individuality and brilliance notwithstanding, were undoubtedly the children of a renaissance that came to Bengal by virtue of it being the capital city of colonial India via the western dialectic of Enlightenment. The crisis within that enlightenment movement in Europe had its impact on the intellectual movements within the country too and the call for independence and the movements woven around it were not completely independent, indigenous, or home-grown. We thus come to the fundamental question that leads us to investigate the dialectics of human intellection and how individual subjectivity is constituted within the ideological structures that are in a continuous state of *becoming* in order to have a *being* of their own.

As the title suggests, the paper is divided into two parts: the first part aims to study the process of human intellection involved in the act of translation of a literary text from one cultural/lingual

situation to that of another and how that leads to a situation of paradox as the semantic import of the narrative text undergoes transmission changes when this act of transaction or negotiation happens, bound as it is to the ideological hegemony of the two socio-literary domains which are under consideration at a specific historical conjuncture. In fact literary metaphysics is supposed to rule out the possibility of (literary) translation. The second part of the paper is at the level of praxis. It focuses on the analysis of a literary narrative to understand how bi-lingualism imposes an identity that changes the contours of the process of signification making the translation an act of intellection that has a potential autonomy relative to the hegemony inherent in the major/minor language dichotomy, resulting in a complete transmutation even when the creative subjectivity is the same and yet not the same.

The aforesaid purpose drove my selection of Rabindranath Tagore's *Kar, akunt,sambāda* from the corpus of his works. The narrative was published in a compilation titled *Kahini* in the Bangla year 1306 which is approximately 1819-1900 C.E. and the English translation was first published in Calcutta in a collection titled *The Fugitive* in 1919, and then two years later in London by Macmillan.

That the author himself is the translator here makes this translation situation more complex. His competence in the languages, viz. Bangla and English - the two language situations that we are concerned with here - can hardly be questioned. Further, the author/translator in question is undoubtedly a poet par excellence and my attempt in the paper is not a mechanical inquiry into whether the translated narrative is an authentic version of the original or not. The authenticity debate is central to translation practitioners and is crucial for translation theory. When however it is the same creative subjectivity, in this case the bi-lingual identity of Tagore, engaged in the twin acts of generation and translation, one can possibly take one

of two stands: first, the author/translator's will or intention was to transmute the narrative to make it more communicable and communicative to the western audience and he is thereby justified in doing what he does. Secondly, the author/translator's pragmatic choice for the transmutation of *Kar, akunṭesambāda* as *Karna and Kunti* is the articulation of the unconscious that finds an expression that is not free from the ideological hegemony within which he tries to negotiate the intercultural transfer, and thus the difference poses a theoretical problematic, warranting the study that I propose to do. The question therefore that becomes central here is: why does the Bangla *Kar, akunṭesambāda* become *Karna and Kunti* in English and what implications does this process have in understanding the dynamics of the dialectics of human intellection?

The method of inquiry that I adopt falls within the Aberlardian tradition of semiotics that proposes a *theory of mental images* for communication to be possible between two *thinking beings* and language is as a consequence a system of signs that allows for the correspondence between the "word" and the "thing". The significative function is therefore a matter of intellection through the dual mental operations of abstraction and synthesis of conceptually re-constituted mental realities. Accordingly, Abelard argues that there are three degrees of knowledge in *Peri Hermeneias*: *sensus* or sensation, *imaginatio* or imagination and *intellectus* or intellection - the dialectical relation of which helps in comprehension and analysis and thereby articulation through the individual psychic/cognitive apparatus conditioned by existential experience (*parole* in the Saussurian sense) following the norms of the social order in which the subject is situated (*langue*). But the conditioning is never absolute and should not be considered as a fixed state of being, but rather as a dynamic one since the process of exchange becomes possible through a continuous intervention and contestation of the thematic system of an ideological field. Human intellection is based on the senses whereby the apprehension of a thing is abstracted from the material/physical domain to the realm of

the imagination and it is the synthesis of the word and the image through intellection that creates a concept which is communicable through the medium of language between interlocutors. But the subject under consideration is the constitution of a literary discourse and the problematic at hand is not the semiotics of the creative process, but that of translation not within the same semiotic system but that of another and the parameters involved are embedded within the material historical processes that posit the possibility of exchange from one domain to the other. If we agree that no matter what cultural ethos a language is embedded in, it is a system of signs, translation of a discourse in it becomes possible because despite all specificities, the human condition is universal in terms of man's biological equipment and ability to cognise and conceptualise the universe. But yet there are processes that impede the transaction and whenever this happens, certain concepts become untranslatable because of the differences that inhere as a function of the culture-determined relationship between experience and cognition in the anthropological cosmos of a speech community that operates within a specific cultural-ideological world and the subjective engagement of the intellective/creative being.

I subject both of Tagore's narratives to a syntagmatic and paradigmatic reading using the anthropological semiotic model that first emerged through a rigorous praxis of H. S. Gill during 1976-79 when he applied it to several of his translating, editing and analytic activities from which I construe the thematic configurations embodied in them. The semic configurations that constitute the narratives embody within their lexicalized structures the translation paradox that researchers both within and outside the domain have tried to unravel. Scholars have often tried to circumvent the translation paradox that emanates from the English writings of Tagore by preferring to refer to them as 'transcreations' rather than as 'translations' and the authenticity question (which is central when the

translator is not the author himself or herself) is hung in limbo and the same evaluative criterion is not called into action. As is known, the problem of translatability is not one of language alone but it is rather of cultural practices and living experiences that find expression in the language being used. (Literary) Translation is typically a hermeneutic act and the paradox of (un)translatability is a paradox of the living reality of experiences conditioned through cultures and traditions that go back to the very dawn of civilization and the organization of social structures and institutions that have evolved through several micro-political processes that were at work. It is the material reality of our social life that conditions the politics of the hermeneutics in operation. The act of communication through translation is possible as, despite all specificities, there is an immanent nature of ideas as pure intellections which can be both expressed and comprehended if one is conscious of the anthropological order of the universe in which the discourse is embedded.

II. The Praxis

The praxis involves the analysis of a discourse. It is like watching as well as unravelling the pattern woven into an embroidered fabric where the distinct image emerges due to the weaving in of several threads towards a single goal. The signification that emanates is of the finished image which is created by a synchronic organization at the manifest level, but the pattern at the conceptual level is however the result of diachronic associations. Similarly, the textual narrative of a literary discourse is constituted by the arrangement of semantic units that are embedded within their lexicalized structures. Francois Rastier's work *Meaning and Textuality* focuses on how a narrow structural linguistic approach undermines the semantic import of the narrative and to understand the process of signification, one has to unravel the semic configurations that are embodied in the text. In order to interpret the code, one has to understand the organization of the signifiers at the

syntagmatic level and consequently interpret the signifieds at the paradigmatic level. An understanding of the semiotics of the discourse leads to the comprehension of the semiological patterns that constitute the process of signification. The "free association of ideas" (see, for an elaboration of the idea, *Semiotics of the Creative Process* by H. S. Gill) allows one to comprehend the semiotic and semiological universe of the discourse and thereby to constitute meaning by an act of reading. The dialectics of human intellection is based on an understanding of the multiple forms through which the mind finds expression in order to be able to create a discourse. The following section focuses on identifying and comparing the syntagmatic arrangement of Tagore's narrative in the Bangla source text as well as in the receptor text to understand the complexities involved in the process that leads to the creation of two distinct semiological universes.

A Comparative Reading of Tagore's *Kar, akunt,sambāda* in Bangla and English

Tagore's primary narrative in Bangla is a poetic rendering written in the mode of the epic structure of the *Mahabharata* and is in the form of a report of the dialogue that happens between *Karna* and *Kunti* just before the battle that was to resume with Karna as the commander of the Kaurava forces. The reporter is not mentioned but the absence is actually an implication of the presence, and the narrative text that emerges in print is a testimony to that. The whole of the *Mahabharata* epic is also in the form of a narration by a seer and Vedyagya viz. Vyas Dev who is the human agent who is blessed to become the inspired author of the narrative. There are several narratives in the eighteen books of the epic and it works within the mythic paradigm. Even the battle of Kurukshetra was related by Sanjay, a royal minister of the court of Hastinapura who was blessed by Vyas Dev with the eyes of a seer so that the blind King

Dhritarashtra could be informed of the course of the war and thereby become a vicarious participant in the war. Tagore too adopts a similar style and chooses a single incident from the *Karna Parva* of the *Mahabharata* and to retain the epic style of narration, he titles his poetic piece as *Kar, akunt, sambāda*. But when he translates his title into English as *Karna and Kunti*, he uses only the dramatic form as a poetic device and the lyrical quality of the primary is completely lost in the translation as the nuances change because the language that becomes the medium of communication is embedded in a cultural context where the epic symbolism of the sub-continent holds little meaning. The conflict that becomes central in the translation then is one between the characters of Karna and Kunti and the only subject that finds a thematic treatment is the angst of a mother who has abandoned her infant boy to save herself from social disgrace and that of a son who lives with a vengeance against the Pandavas as the course of his life is such that he is fated to live under the curse of hatred as he is not in the know of the mystery of his own birth and thereby of his identity. The curse that determines the fate of Karna as well as Kunti in the translation leads to the tragic consequence of defeat and death and, keeping to the spirit of the classical heroic tradition of Europe, Karna rushes forward to meet his inevitable end. The narrative logic in the translation thus follows a simple linearity of movement whereas in the Bangla version, a layered matrix evolves to create a dialectical tension between the domain of nature and culture whereby the anthropological universe paves the way for the cosmological unity in which Karna finds the psychic equipoise not possible in the turmoil of the former.

The First Sequence: The opening lines of the narrative show Karna in humble supplication by the banks of the holy river Ganges, praying to the Sun God. He is taken by surprise when he sees before him the figure of a lady who later reveals her identity as Kunti, the queen-mother. Leaving behind all notions of shame, she has come to tell him the truth of his identity and birth but implores him to wait till darkness envelops the earth.

The Second Sequence: Kunti recalls the day of the trial of arms in Hastinapura when Karna was humiliated by the Pandavas and Kripa, the royal priest for his mean birth. She then makes her entreaty and says that she has come to re-unite him with his brothers and place him highest among all her sons since he is her first-born.

The Third Sequence: Kunti's revelation puts Karna in a dilemma. His sense of duty puts him in a strange moral predicament when he comes to know about the truth of his real identity. He seems to lose himself in a world of dreams refusing to allow his consciousness to return.

The Fourth Sequence: Kunti's yearning brings him back to reality. The dream-like state is soon torn asunder as underlying the sweetness of his re-union to his mother lies the angry bitterness of the rejection by her when he was merely an infant. He seeks the cause of that early betrayal but realizing her discomfiture, he refrains from insisting on answers to his questions. But the question she has to answer is: why did she choose that particular moment to take him back and unite him with his brothers?

Kunti, well prepared for the question, acknowledges her guilt and, seeking forgiveness, says that only through the fire of suffering would she be purified and be free from the burden of bearing it.

The Fifth Sequence: Karna, humbled by her words of repentance, seeks her blessing but refuses to go with her and foregoes any claim to honour or pride in a royal identity. He resolves to free himself from the envy that he fed on and embarks on the path of liberating himself from the bonds of life. He urges Kunti to abandon him once more to his fate, like at the hour of his birth, nameless, shelter-less,

and to bless him that he may not be swerved from the path of heroic virtue even though he is assured of death and defeat.

Syntagmatics

In this section, an attempt is made to present the outline of the semiotic structure of the discourse without going into the details of textual configuration. The semiological patterns of the ensembles and subensembles of signifying units will be discussed in the next section.

In the *first sequence* five signifying ensembles by five images or subensembles can be delineated. The first sub-ensemble begins with a "comprehensive" proposition where in a sentence the whole ambience of the narrative is unfolded. On the banks of the holy Jahnabi River, (*Jahnabi* refers to Ganga but there the name is significant because it refers to the legend of the river being the daughter of Rishi Jahnu who had on a certain auspicious day drunk up the waters of the entire river). Karna is seen engaged in humble supplication at the twilight hour. His meditative posture and his concentrated worship of the Sun God (*sabita* refers to 'sun', to the benevolent aspect of Sun rather, and here the Sun is seen setting and hence the light and radiance are gradually fading, calling forth the hour of darkness) is indicative of his internal psychic constitution which is to be soon disturbed, leading to an inner disorder which would witness a violence of the highest order.

The following sentence is an evocation of the central question that the narrative grapples with - identity - and the partial signifiers are propositions in extension of the absent-yet-present subject as it only unfolds the image of a being engaged in meditation at a holy hour when the light is seen fading away, heralding the peace that is present only in the womb of darkness. So, the concluding signifying sub-ensemble indicates the name of the subject - *kar, a nāma 》ara-* "One whose name is Karna"; and

through it is indicated the parentage - *adhiratha sūtaputra* - "the son of the charioteer Adhiratha" and in the phrase, *rādhā-garbha-jāta* 'born from Radha's womb', and the proposition finds completion in [1. d. iv] - *shēi āmi* "That is me". The way the identity is revealed is highly complex. Karna indicates who he is by separating the speaking subject from the meditative subject indicating a psychic split within his being which even in an intensely reflective mood, at a holy hour, he is unable to restore even some semblance of unity. In [1. e], he now asks the long-absent intruder: *kahō mōrē tumi kē gō māta* "Tell me who you are, mother!"

Now if one compares the first signifying ensemble with the translated text, one sees that the proposition begins as a statement of obvious facts - "I am Karna, the son of the charioteer, Adhiratha, and I sit here by the holy bank of the Ganges, to worship the setting sun. Tell me who you are". The order of the sentences has changed and there is the unnecessary emphasis on 'I' which is repeated twice in the same sentence and is counter-pointed against the 'you' in the next line making the conflict apparent as a conflict between Karna and Kunti. But this ego-centricity is not there in the original text and the emphasis that is created evocatively is to indicate the mood of meditative reflection through the play of the thickening light that darkens with the fading rays of the sun into complete darkness and a mother's protective womb, where there is complete silence and peace - a condition that Karna never had the good fortune to enjoy or revel in. The psychic state that makes the subject split his internal self into the speaking and the meditative/reflective self can never be imposed as the subjective 'I', as in the English translation, as it is in this inner tension of the sub-conscious that the drama of the rape of desire plays out: the desire to know and thereby withdraw into the state of passive oblivion. The reference to his mother - *radhagarbhajato* 'born of radha's womb' - and the reference to Kunti as "mother" are significant absences in the translated text and

one thus witnesses a complete reversal of the psychic state and further, the tonal quality of the mood evoked is also lost in the translation. The rhythm of the Bangla version has a slow temporality and the spatial dynamics that is operative hinges on indeterminacy as it is truly the twilight hour when truth and existence teeter on the brink of collapse - a final collapse and the human question becomes obfuscated in a feeling of crucial nothingness that intensifies with the gathering darkness. The translation shows Karna full of confidence and well aware of his identity and he seeks to ask the stranger who she is in no uncertain terms. The soft, gentleness of the opening lines and the flowing rhythm imitates the flow of the river and encapsulates within its core the continuum of time (and thought) that flows by unhindered (if no intrusion happens). The disjunction/distortion of the translation is thus apparent and the causes for it would be traced later.

The second signifying sub-ensemble begins in the form of an address, *vatsa - vatsa* means "child" - which is indicative of the extension of the earlier proposition establishing a relation that exists or can exist irrespective of blood ties. Kunti's address to Karna as "child" is pre-emptive of the course of events to follow. The phrase - *tōra jēvanēra prathama prabhātē* - "in the first dawn of your life" - is a partial signifier which is further extended through - *paricaya karāyēchi tōrē viśva-sāthē* - "had acquainted you with this world" The word *parichoy* is very important as the Bangla word reflects both acquaintance and identity which fact is in turn indicative of the central problematic of the narrative. The next two micro-units reflect the purpose of Kunti's visit. Kunti, shedding all hesitation - *lāja / lajja* - (something which she wasn't able to do at the moment of his birth as a maiden-mother) - had come to confer on him the truth of his identity - *parichoy*. The word *parichoy* is repeated twice in this sub-ensemble to create the inner play that is so central to evoking the *bhaava* that reflects the tense mental state of the characters.

In the translated text, the format is of a reply to the question that was earlier asked regarding identity, but the word itself never finds any mention. The hesitation that Kunti has because of her sense of guilt towards Karna and the responsibility of being the mother of not only the Pandavas but also of Karna find no resonance in the English version. Rather a new idea is introduced in the phrase "with that light you are worshipping" indicating the "setting sun" of the earlier stanza. The co-relation of *viśvar* "world" and the dual meanings of "parichoy" viz. 'acquaintance' and 'identity' are completely lost. The whole idea of unfolding as opposed to a factual statement of identity makes the translation too direct and the symbolic overtones and the poetic nuances of the Bangla version are completely obliterated and along with it, the aesthetic rigour of the portrayal.

The third ensemble is an address to Kunti and the play of images is indicative of the implications that the revelation had on him. In the first micro-ensemble, he expresses the state of his consciousness and says that the rays from her lowered eyelids seemed to stir his inner being just like the impact the rays of the sun have on the snow-capped mountain peaks. In the next micro-unit, he says that her voice seems to emanate from another world, as if from his previous birth and arouses in him a strange melancholy (*apūrva vēdanā*). The third micro-unit is therefore a proposition in extension, and it urges her to reveal to him how the mystery of his birth is related to her, someone who is yet unknown to him.

In the translation, the introduction of the word "cause" changes the whole ambience of signification as then what Karna is seeking to do is to know merely the source of his "blind sadness" (which is not quite an equivalent of *apūrva vēdanā*) that "may well lie beyond the reach of my earlier memory". The notion of 'previous birth' (*pūrvajanma*) again is not the same as "earlier" (or even

earliest) memory" but the obvious connotative and denotative differences arise due to the specificity of the semantic field in which a language operates within the material, historical forces that give shape to a living or lived culture. The notion of "earlier memory" is embedded in the Platonic idealist tradition that conceives of reality in purely metaphysical terms as an abstraction and the material world that appears as real is actually a reflection of the real that lies embedded in the hidden depths of a mind that has swerved from the contemplation of the real as ideal. But *purbajanma* or 'previous birth' has in its conception the idea of re-births that keep occurring on a physical/material level till *atman* 'soul' is free from the bondage of the cycle of birth, death and re-birth. The idea of causality in the translated text is therefore central while in the Bangla original, such an idea would be foreign to the idea of life being a continuous cycle, and it is the freedom from this chain of events that leads to *moksha* 'liberation'.

In the fourth sub-ensemble, Kunti urges him to be patient for a while as the Sun God is seen retiring for the day. She waits for the darkness of the evening to condense further into the blackness of the night as she is unable to reveal her true identity in the illumination of the sun. Her *laj* (or *lajja* - 'sense of shame') prevents her from speaking when there is still light and it is only in the pitch darkness of the night that she is able to unfold the truth of her identity as well as her relation to Karna.

In the translated text, the notion of darkness is counter-pointed against the "prying eyes of day" as the metaphoric resonance of *deb dibaakar* has a mythic relevance related to Karna's birth because Kunti had tried to test the boon of her ability to conceive by engaging the elemental forces and her first unconscious target was the Sun God (*dēva divākara*- 'lord of the day'). The result was the birth of Karna when she was still a maiden and it is this that made her hesitate. The English translation of this unit is not a disjunction but a shift in meaning, which occurs not only due to the difference in

cultural contexts and a kind of pragmatism that might be there to suit the needs of, or pander to, the target readership.

The fifth sub-ensemble is a single-unit entity as Karna acknowledges with surprise the identity of Kunti, the mother of Arjuna, his arch-opponent. The semanteme *arjunajanana* is what creates a discord at the end of the first sequence of the narrative as it breaks into the silent, meditative ambience of the earlier sub-ensembles initiating the beginning of a disintegration of the inner psychic order.

The *second sequence* has two signifying ensembles. The first ensemble has eight sub-ensembles. Kunti answers Karna in the affirmative knowing full well the implications inherent in the fact of being Arjuna's mother, but that prompts her to make the further entreaty - "But do not, therefore, hate me" [P. 304]. The reference to Arjuna as "your antagonist" is to make it clear to the western audience the relational axis between Karna and Arjuna as adversaries in the battle of Kurukshetra that was fought between the Kauravas and Pandavas over the throne of Hastinapura.

The next few micro-ensembles recount all the painful moments that Kunti as Karna's mother had to undergo. This makes her recall all the moments of humiliation that Karna (*kaninputra* 'one born from the ear', *kumarigarbhajata* 'born from the womb of a maiden') had to contend with due to the (unfortunate) circumstances of his birth and upbringing. The propositions in this unit are in the form of an elaborate "infix" as it has connections with events that are yet to follow and in fact, they prepare the ground for the final violence that is to take place. The incident recounted is the day of the trial of arms in Hastinanagar when Karna made his first entry. The attributes used to describe the appearance of Karna is in relation to the first light of dawn and again we witness how the

symbolic matrix is enriched with the reference to the sun as "arun", which indicates the radiant aspect of the sun. The use of the word *pūrvāśā* in [1. b] of this sequence is interesting as it indicates a duality - the word means both *purba dik* - "the eastern horizon" and *pūrvēra prati aśā* - "past expectation" and in the translated text, this whole unit is missing. Kunti's sorrow too is expressed in a series of images and in the translation, her speechlessness- *vākyahānā abhāgin* 'mute hapless woman' - and her thirst for the love of her child inducing an agony as intense as the sting of a thousand snakes - *atapta snēhakāudhāra sahasra nāgin* *jāgāyē jarjara vak* - is reduced to a single epithet "unhappy", quite in keeping with the factual thrust of a literal discourse and it thus fails to capture the psychic overtones of a mother forced to conceal her identity and thereby conceal the fact of her motherhood from her son due to the burden of tradition and the strictures of common morality.

In the third sub-ensemble, Kripa's intervention is recounted. It is who has made Karna's humiliation complete: at the royal gathering, he has asked him the name of his father. Realizing that Karna does not have a royal parentage, Kripa claims that he has no right to fight with Arjuna

rājakulē janma nahē »ara
arjunēra sāthē »uddhe nāhi adhikāra.

‘Since Karna is not born of royal blood,
he has no right to fight with Arjuna’

The proposition made through the issue of *adhikar* 'right' is central to Karna's existential human condition. The reduction of the concept of "royal birth" and "rights" to a mere "mean birth" is problematic. Further, the whole idea expressed in

arakta anata mukhe na rahila va ,
da~~h~~Aye rahile, sei lajja-abhakhani

dahila »ahara vakṛta agnisama teje
ke se abhaginē?

is lost in its putative rendering,

*"You stood speechless, like a thunder-cloud at sunset
flashing with an agony of suppressed light."*

That Karna's face is "flushed" - (whether in shame or in anger or both) is indicated by the word *arakta* followed by *anato mukhe* - "lowered face", and hence his state of speechlessness and the transfixed posture! Nowhere features the idea of "an agony of suppressed light" and hence the state of "speechlessness" and the only *bhaava* that emanates in the English translation is of concealed or barely restrained anger which is hardly the way in which Karna is presented in the Bangla version.

Duryodhana, the usurper of the throne of Hastinapura is referred to by Kunti as *dhanva*. She hails him as her son since he has retrieved Karna from this situation of shame by declaring him the king of Anga, a prominent province under the rule of the Kauravas. In the translation, however, Tagore again tries to indicate a cause for Duryodhana's action and states - "who perceived your worth" - and hence Kunti is profuse in her praise of Duryodhana. There is again a problem in the translated text because in the Bangla version Tagore is pre-occupied with presenting only Kunti's agony at not being able to shield her child from the fingers pointing to his birth. Kunti is not engaged in any evaluation of Karna as she has come to him with a prayer in mind and she wants him to grant it with all his heart. But the deviation in the translation can be rationalized because arguably the idea in the expressions "who perceived your worth" and "thus winning the Kauravas a champion" is to communicate the reason why and how Karna was fighting on

the side of the Kauravas as the Commander-in Chief in the battle of Kurukshetra.

In the next micro-ensemble, Kunti recounts her moment of joy when Karna places his crowned head at the feet of Adhiratha, the charioteer, his father and seeing this, the Pandavas break into "jeering laughter". The translation of

abhi^ॐtekasikta sira lu^ॐāyē cara, ē
sūtav^ॐddhē pra, amilē pit^ॐsambhā^ॐ, ē

laid his crowned head at his (= Adhirath's) feet
and greeted him as a father

as "laid your crown at his feet" communicates the central idea of humility, but what it fails to indicate is the proud acknowledgement by Karna of the fatherhood of the old charioteer. Again, placing the crown at one's feet is quite inadequate as, in the western context, it is an act of surrender but in the open court Karna is acknowledging with dignity his humble birth and parentage that has no royal connection and he thus places his newly crowned head on the feet of the old charioteer who has come to bless him, braving the milling crowd, thereby making a silent statement of resistance against Kripa's words, as mentioned earlier. It is this heroic humility and the capacity for resistance that Kunti hails him for and feels proud of getting him and it thus acts as an "infix" to be elaborated on later.

In the next sub-ensemble, the first three micro-ensembles reveal that Karna has learnt the reason why Kunti, the mother of kings, has come to him alone, in the battlefield to the Commander-in-Chief of the Kaurava forces. She had a prayer - and for the first time, she addresses him as "son" instead of "child" and the partial signifier of *bhik^ॐā* *ache* (begging for alms / prayer) is completed by the command-like entreaty - *viphala na phiri* *ena* 'don't send me empty-handed'. She makes the request as a mother and like the

royal mother she imposes her will, saying that she should not return without the grant of her wish. Karna is dumb-founded - *bhikṣā, mōr kāchē!* 'You want alms from me?' and his surprise is expressed not only in the reversal of the order of words in the sentence, but also by the exclamation mark in the end. And then even before hearing what her prayer is, he swears that apart from his own manhood and sense of duty he is ready to obey her command. In the English translation, Tagore uses the word "honour" to indicate the notion of "dharma" and qualifies it by relating it to the idea of manhood and the honour of a Kshatriya, but Karna's "dharma" is rather the sense of duty that makes him swear that he would fulfil her prayer. He has been overwhelmed by the revelation of Kunti being his mother and his existential situation makes it imperative that he fulfils his duty as a son here rather than as a Kshatriya warrior. Again, *bhikṣā* is not "boon" and the translation of *putra, bhikṣā ache -viphalā na phiri vena* as "I have a boon to crave" is in complete disjunction to the connotation in the original text. Kunti being the royal mother has her own pride as a *kṣārtiya nārī* and she can never "crave" for a "boon" - her prayer or entreaty would rather have the form of a command as she has come to reveal her identity to Karna to impose her will.

The following sub-ensemble is a proposition in comprehension as it indicates the purpose of Kunti who asserts that she has come to take him, and to Karna's question regarding the intended destination, she responds with "in the midst of her thirsting breast, in the lap of her motherliness". The notion of *mātṛkrōṣe* is missing in the translation and its absence is supported by the phrase "for your love" - the connotation of which is more context-friendly for the western audience.

In the next two sub-ensembles, the semantic thrust of the proposition is extended. Karna still tries to grapple with the fact that

Kunti, blessed as she is with five sons, is undoubtedly fortunate, and yet she has approached him, who has no proper ancestral lineage or any family honour and is a small chieftain. What place could Kunti give him? In the receiver English text *paṅcaputra* has been translated as "five brave kings" whereas it merely means "five sons" and the shift that results even contradicts the narrative of the epic.

The conflict that Karna poses in the translated text is an opposition between his position as a "small chieftain" and that of kings but in the Bangla version, the problem is of finding his position - legitimacy - among the five other sons of Kunti. And therefore in the next sub-ensemble which is an extension of the earlier proposition, Kunti says:

sarva-uccabhāgē
tomāre vasāva mōra sarvaputra-āgē
jḗḥāḥa putra tumi!

"at the highest position, will I place you, before all my sons - you are my first born"

But the translation condenses the semantic expanse of the proposition and reduces it to "your place is before all my sons" which has no co-relation to the earlier line - "five brave kings".

In the third sequence, there are four signifying ensembles. The first ensemble can be divided into three sub-units in which, Karna asks Kunti the most fundamental question that indicates his human predicament: *kōn adhikāra madē / pravēḥa kariva sēthā?* – 'with what right would I enter there?' In the translated text, the next two micro-units are not indicated and yet they are crucial to the narrative because they reflect the essence of Karna's inner constitution. These are propositions, which work together as an infix that later finds an extension. The phrase *jḗḥāḥa putra tumi!* of the second sequence finds an evocation in this unit as *jḗḥāḥa* which not

only means "first born" or "eldest" but also *brahma, a* - it indicates Karna's renunciatory capacity which is the only attribute of a true *brahma, a* - the one who has conquered all material desires of the physical world. So Karna asks in the second and third micro-units of the first signifying sub-ensemble what rights he had to curtail the rights of those who have been denied their rights to their kingdom over maternal love which neither follows the mercantile logic of exchange nor can be won by the virtue of physical strength - it is a gift of the divine! By acknowledging the rights of the Pandavas over and above his claim to his mother's love, Karna accepts them as his brothers and thereby fulfils his "dharma" or duty as a son and that too, the duty of the first-born.

Kunti's plea in the next ensemble can be divided into four sub-units. She raises the issue both of his right and of the divinely ordained claim by saying that it is with the 'permission of the creator' (= *vidhātāra adhikāra*) that he had been born to her and therefore, he had the right to return amid all his brothers and his mother with dignity and without any hesitation. In the translated text, the four sub-units are reduced into a single-unit proposition - "your own God-given right to your mother's love".

The third ensemble has eleven sub-units. The first sub-ensemble is a proposition in comprehension. It indicates the sequence of a dream that Kunti's words has evoked. The next sub-unit is an extension of the idea of a dream whereby the darkness seems to be permeating the very atmosphere, and all nature is hidden while the Bhagirathi flows soundlessly (another name of Ganges, that has mythic overtones - Bhagirath's penance had been successful in bringing the waters of the Ganges to the earth from the heavens and directed her course so that it could be taken towards the place where the sons of King Sagar lay in a heap of ashes due to the curse of Kapil Muni and it is through the purificatory effect of the holy

waters that their lives were renewed and hence, the reference to Ganga as Bhagirathi). It is this connotation that the river bears that is carried forward when Karna feels that his inner being is being taken into some illusory world, a forgotten abode in the dawn of primal consciousness. In the next sub-ensemble, there are several partial signifiers that constitute the highly charged narrative matrix. Like the oldest truth, the words of Kunti orchestrated upon him, holding him in a thrall. As if in the state of primal infancy he is engulfed in the darkness of his mother's womb. This whole sub-ensemble has been condensed in the translation and the next five sub-units have been fused into a single-unit proposition - "The gloom of evening ... twilight consciousness". The next proposition in the translated version is therefore a query into the irreality of the state of being he is in and he wants a return to the world of the real and so, asks Kunti to place her right hand on his forehead. But in the Bangla text, he foregoes the urge to delve into the world of the real and it is in extension to the first proposition in the opening sequence that his meditative self requests her - "the loving one" (*snēhamayē*) - to place her right hand in a momentary caress over his forehead and chin.

The phrase *suniyāchi lōkamukhē* has been rendered as "rumour" in English, but the Bangla word merely indicates that he has heard from the people that his mother has abandoned him at birth. The next six micro-units are thus an extension of his dream, which encapsulates the hidden core of his desire - in the depths of his unconscious he had seen his birth-giver (= *jananē*) come to see him and he had pleadingly cried in agony - "unveil your face". But as soon as his voice shattered the silence of the night, the dream-image of his mother disappeared from in front of his mental eye and the illusion faded. But how is it that the dream of his sub-conscious took a physical shape and appeared as a tangible reality in the form of the Pandava mother that evening hour, in the middle of the battlefield, by the banks of the river Bhagirathi! The exclamation

mark at the end of this sub-sequence is denotative of Karna's inner psychic state which hovers between the twilight threshold of belief and disbelief.

The next sub-unit however brings him back to the physical world and the inner dialogue of the mind is externalized in his address to Kunti as "devi" - as he sees the lights illuminating the Pandava camp and the sound of horses in the Kaurava side - his reverie is finally broken. He comes back to the real world as he realizes that the following morning would herald the beginning of the biggest of wars. And hence the next proposition in disjunction. He wonders why he had to hear the tone of motherly affection in the language of addressing that Arjuna's mother uses? Why did his name sound like sweet music when uttered by her? Completely taken aback, he realizes that his mind has acquired an autonomy of its own and he has an unwitting, and an uncontrollably felt, desire to be acknowledged as the brother of the Pandavas.

The translation does not embody the duality that enhances the ambivalence in Karna's mind and the queries that are raised emanate from the external speaking self rather than from the withdrawn, internal self, the depths of the sub-conscious mind.

In the fourth signifying ensemble Kunti endearingly beckons him, addressing him as 'child' but in the translation, the notion of "delay not, my son!" is introduced, as if Kunti is in a hurry to take him away, although it could never have been her intention. Karna assures her that he would accompany her without questions, without any doubt or fear since she is his mother. His inner consciousness has been stirred by her call, and forgotten to him is the victory of war. False to him is the hatred of war, the strife for glory and the desire for fame in vanquishing the adversary. He agrees to go wherever she takes him along. But in the following sub-unit, when

she indicates the opposite bank of the river as her destination he knows that the reality is nothing but an illusion. He therefore requests her to re-affirm that he is truly her son and on the opposite bank there was the hope of finding his mother forever. Her answer makes him contend with the discord that is imminent in the proposition - *putra mōra* - "O my son!" Ironically it has a jarring effect because the acknowledgement of her identity makes him face the bitterest truth - the ultimate violence of Kunti that robs him even of his anger against those whom he considered his opponents, making his whole endeavour in the battle a meaningless exercise.

The *fourth sequence* has three signifying ensembles and the first unit has four sub-ensembles which are in complete disjunction with the Karna's earlier utterances. In the first unit, Karna questions why Kunti abandoned him in a world completely unknown to him without any identity or name and even without the love of a mother? Why did she forsake him and allow him to float adrift in the current of rejection, outlaw him from the natural kinship of his brothers? The chasm between Arjuna and him had been widened forever and therefore the proposition here is both an extension and an infix as he asks why from early childhood he had been sustained on a blind envy and unabated hatred for Arjuna. He questions his mother's speechlessness! And in the third sub-unit, there is a change of tone as his mother's shame permeates through the engulfing darkness and he could feel it with his very being. His eyes droop in her shame and therefore he seeks to refrain from pestering her with questions that have no obvious answers. In the translation, the sub-unit is only partially presented and in the earlier section - *māta न निरुत्तरा?* (= mother, answerless?) has become "you remain speechless". But it is the acknowledgement of her as his mother that makes it possible for him to empathize with her painful shame and the discomfiture of her position and also make his forgiveness later imperative. Otherwise, the inner relationship that Karna and Kunti share becomes merely an external factor and creates a disjunction in the

psychic progression of the being. The sub-ensemble beginning with the lines

vidhira prathama dāna ē viśvasaśēśārē
mātṛsnēha kēna sēi dēvatāra dhana
āpana santāna hatē karilē hara, a
sē kathāra diyō nā utara

can never mean the same as "never explain to me what made you rob your son of his mother's love!" as kernel semantemes like *vidhira prathama dāna* and *dēvatāra dhana* are equated with *mātṛsnēha* and the first divine gift is therefore the blessing of the love of a mother. The translation centres on the notion of *hara, a* "snatch away by force" rather than merely "rob" slyly and the violence that inheres in the Bangla sentence is completely lost in English. The micro-unit is therefore an extension of the proposition in the third sequence and through it, the idea indicated there about the real purpose of her visit finds completion.

In the second signifying ensemble, Kunti's answer can be divided into sub-ensembles. In the first one, she emphasizes the justification for Karna's rage and avers that her act of abandonment has become a sin and it followed her through life like a dogged curse because she has forever been yearning for her lost son and in the second, she calls herself fortunate (= *bhāgavata*) because she has now met him, acknowledges her sin, and hopes that it is the innocence of speechless infancy that would make Karna forgive his 'recreant mother' (= *kumātā*). And it is this forgiveness that would render her pure by burning away her sinful shame. In the translation, there is mention of being "dogged by a curse" (P. 307) which makes Kunti's sin an act not of choice but of compulsion, much like the impact of fate as a force that subordinates the will of an individual and makes him/her a plaything in the hands of the powers above.

Kunti never mentions anything about her "life's pleasures run to waste" or her pain being similar to that of childlessness as a state of mind – *tavu mōra citta putrahena* "I don't consider you as my son" literally, 'you are not my mind-son'. Her physical motherhood of begetting five more sons could not bridge the gap, nor reduce her yearning for her abandoned first-born and it is this guilt that became the curse.

In the third sub-sequence, addressing his mother Karna says *dēha pādadhūl* - "give me the dust on your feet" and accept my tears or rather "annoint thy feet with my tears". In a cultural context, where the idea of *pra. āma* (greeting by touching the feet) is foreign, the notion of *pādadhūl* (the dust of feet) would also perhaps seem ridiculous and hence the omission. But what one has to remember is that the omission is largely due to the nature of the colonial dominance over local languages and cultures, which either transforms native concepts or obliterates them completely as they are subordinate and do not require any comprehension on the part of the white reader.

In the *fifth sequence*, there are six signifying ensembles. The first ensemble contradicts every proposition that Kunti has made before:

tōrē lava vak. ~~ā~~ tūli
sē sukha-āsāya, putra, āsi nāi dvārē.

'I have not come at your door with that happy hope
Of enfolding you in my heart'

She claimed that she had not come with the hope of winning Karna back when her emotional victory over him was truly complete. Her purpose, as she asserted, was to restore him his due right. She purposefully attempts to reinforce the idea that he was not the son of a charioteer, but rather the son of a king and therefore

abandoning the memory of all earlier episodes, he should accompany her to where the Pandavas were.

The single-unit proposition in the next signifying ensemble reflects Karna's misunderstanding of her purpose and he tries to convince her that he is truly the son of the charioteer and that Radha was his mother and in his humility lay his pride and hence his assertion that the Pandavas may be where they are and the Kauravas in their own place - he has no reason to envy any one. The translation does not acknowledge the third micro-ensemble and the proposition thus remains incomplete as neither the emotional turmoil of Karna is reflected nor the hidden purpose behind Kunti's play of words - the acknowledgement of which makes the rape of his desire a complete annihilation of his existence.

Kunti's imploring speech constitutes the third signifying ensemble and here the same idea is extended as she urges him to win back his kingdom by the force of his strength. In the next five micro-ensembles, she paints an elaborate picture of how Yudhisthira, Bhima and Arjuna would assist him in different ways while the holy Brahmins would be chanting the *Vedas* giving divine sanction to his legitimate claims of kingship. She lures him with the offer of the kingdom making her underlying motive evident but this whole section is absent in the translation which leaves the fake ring of her words unnoticed and thereby her real intention. She has been able to provoke Karna and incite his scorn and contempt for kingly rights and yet retain his sympathy for her as his mother, thereby guaranteeing the safety of her five sons in the forthcoming battle.

In the fourth sub-unit of the fourth signifying ensemble, Karna hurls the word "kingdom!" at her with all his being and follows it with the next micro-unit by saying, "Must you, who once refused me mother's love, tempt me with a kingdom?" (P. 307) His

refusal to claim his material rights is imperative as he follows the chivalric code of conduct and thinks that adhering to it is his sole duty.

ekadina »e sampadē karēcha vaµcita
sē āra phirāyē dēōyā tava sādhaµtata

'It is beyond your powers to return the wealth
that you once deprived me of '

This unit indicates his absolute comprehension of Kunti's paradox and he thus sees a way out of it by refusing to leave his charioteer-parents and his allegiance to the Kauravas in [4b] and rationalizes his statement, saying *tavē dhik mōrē* - "Then, shame be on me!" if he transgresses the heroic code and cheats those to whom he owes his existence.

In the fifth ensemble, the four sub-units complete Kunti's final victory over Karna. In the first unit, she addresses him as *vera* which means 'brave' and *dhanµa*, which means 'blessed' and thereby "great". In the next sub-unit, she blames *dharmā*, and not "God" as it is indicated in the translation, because it is the sense of duty which she had not fulfilled as mother when Karna was an infant and it is this that comes back to claim her all in the persona of the adult Karna through the hoary gloom of a past darkness to pitilessly snatch away the children from his own mother. This is the curse - "*abhiśāpa*" - that returns to avenge her failings in motherly duties and central to it is the notion of the law of "*karma*" - so central to the Vedic philosophy which is elaborately articulated in the *Gita*.

In the concluding ensemble, there are three sub-units. The first sub-sequence reassures the mother, the second re-affirms that the final victory would be the Pandavas' and the third urges her to abandon him once more, but with the blessing that he may never swerve from the path of heroic duty. In this proposition is a futuristic prediction as through the eyes of the seer, that he is able to witness

the outcome of the war by reading the signs evident in the path of the stars in heaven. The silence all around enables him to hear the music of defeated endeavours and the hopeless strife for action. He could see the void that waits as the consequence of the war:

ēḥ śānta stavdhakā, ē
ananta ākāśa hatē paśitēchē manē
jayahna cēnāra saḅgata, āśāhna
karmra udama - hēritēchi śāntimaya
śūna pari, āma.

In the translation, the line is rendered as "my heart is full of the music of a hopeless venture, and baffled end". Later the proposition is extended by the ideas of "desperate and forlorn" and "expectation of defeat and death" which completely contradict the image of Karna as in the Bangla version but completes the idea of Karna as the egotistical being as presented in the English text and his doomed end as a natural consequence of some kind of hubris or pride.

But the Karna in *Kar, akuntāsambāda*, the original text withdraws into his meditative self like the perfect sage and he continues to be on the side of the vanquished, not as an act of fate but as a matter of choice and the destiny that awaits him is thus not pre-ordained, but of his own making as per the law of Karma. He no longer yearns for either fame or glory as action itself has become meaningless. He gains in inner strength, and despite the knowledge of the violence committed by his mother against his desire to avenge his destiny (*adḥāna*), he calmly relents and lets go of all claim seeking only one blessing:

śudhu ēi āśrvāda diyē jāō mōrē
jayalōbhē ḥaśolobhe rājāalōbhē, ayi,

vērera sadgati hatē bhraṭṭā nāhi hoi

‘give me this blessing of heroic death
not as a covetor of wealth, success and kingdom’

which does not find an echo in the translation. *vērera sadgati* ‘heroic death’ indicates the passage from mortal life on the merit of one’s own excellence and Karna’s excellence lies in the idea of *daana* or ‘the supreme act of giving’ which carries with it the import of renouncing all personal claims to physical/mortal/material life.

Semiological Patterns

Following the synchrony of events as unfolded by the linguistic units of signification, the detailed semiotic analysis of the text in Bangla in contrast with the English translation, prepares us to attempt a delineation of the semiological patterns in the narrative discourse and see how the same author’s articulation becomes not merely a matter of "differance" and "deference" but how the very act of intellection is governed by structures received through language and culture. Karna’s character undergoes a significant change as it transits from Bangla into English. Attracted as Tagore is by the strangeness in Karna’s character, the duality in Karna seems to be Tagore’s main pre-occupation in the Bangla original. Quite in keeping with the *Rasa* theory in Indian Poetics, he evokes the *vērarasa* as the governing *rasa* and elaborates on the central *bhaava* associated with the concept of *dāna* or giving (Karna is also known as *dānavera kar, a*, the munificent, magnanimous Karna). When however he translates the text into the language of the then colonial masters, Karna becomes an Anglo-Saxon character whose destiny forces him to lie vanquished in the "expectation of defeat and death". He becomes more like a figure of European Renaissance humanism rather than the legendary renderings about him in both popular oral folk traditions as well as those in the classical ones. Now, how does one resolve the impasse with which a translator is grappling on the

interfacial threshold of two languages and two cultures? Let us first focus on the thematic configurations of the narratives and see where and how the disjunctions occur:

- a) The concept of identity vs. conflict
- b) The concept of conflict vs. curse
- c) The concept of resignation vs. defeat

The First Thematic Configuration: The Concept of Identity vs. the Concept of Conflict

In the first narrative sequence, Karna's meditative posture by the banks of the river Jahnabi shows him in a state of complete withdrawal as his whole being is focused in establishing a holy communion with the fading light of the Sun (*sabita*) as it is setting. It is an interesting paradox that the poet introduces in the opening lines as the inner enlightenment is possible only by a willing annihilation of the physical senses and absolving of all subjective pre-suppositions by a willing suspension of the self. In the use of the epithet *jahnabi* as opposed to Ganga (the daughter of Himadri) the poet establishes a thematic co-relation with the legend of *Jahnu muni* (*Jahnu* sage) who had swallowed the waters of the entire river as she (= the river) had the audacity of destroying his 'ashrama' and it was only later, when his anger subsided, that he related and allowed Ganga to flow free through a complete re-birth by severing the flesh of his upper thigh (*Jahnu*, the sanskrit word for 'thigh') and hence, her identity as Jahnabi. Karna's references to himself are indirect since his existence is not free from the obscure origins of his parentage. Karna never appears in the persona of Basusen, the name given to him by Adhiratha and Radha, but he is *kanin-putra* "son born from the ear" and *kumari-garbha-jata* "born from the womb of a maiden" and thereby Karna. Like the mythic resonance of the fate of *Jahnabi*, the river, Karna too awaits a similar destiny when Kunti

intrudes upon his contemplativeness by the banks of the river as he unknowingly attempts a communion with the Sun-God, who was his father. But that communion could never have been completed without the revelation of Kunti but interestingly, the narrative centres only on motherhood, not on fatherhood and the omission is not without reason. The answers to this issue are to be found in the ethnographic and anthropological constitutions of ancient societies and the whole problem of Vedic incorporation of older forms of living practices and rituals and the process of hegemonization that subsumed primitive tribal formations. But a foray into that would be a culpable digression at this juncture.

Kunti reveals her identity first as his begetter and then asks him to patiently wait for the light of day (*dēva divākara* - 'lord / god of day') to completely fade away so that in the darkness of the night she is able to tell him her name. The whole notion of waiting for darkness is extremely crucial as her shame forbids her to face the light and her guilt-ridden consciousness makes it imperative that she meets Karna, her son in the absence of light. Again, the sun being her partner in bringing Karna into the world due to a boon by *ṛ̥ṣi* *dūrvāsā* made the sun, the male cosmic principle and due to the force of custom and tradition, it was difficult for Kunti to reveal to Karna the mystery around his birth.

The impact of Kunti's first utterance struck a resonant chord, a kind of prior knowledge in Karna as if the sound emanated from a forgotten domain in some previous birth, but what it unfailingly did was produce a certain harmony despite the strangeness of the melancholic strain (*apūrvā vēdanā*). Kunti's endearing address to him as child and Karna's reference to her as mother instead of *dēv* establishes the relation even before any utterance specifying the relation was made.

As opposed to this, in Tagore's English translation, the first thematic configuration is structured around the theme of conflict. The obvious statement of facts with which the narrative begins and the opposition between the propositions "I am Karna" and "Tell me who you are" in the first stanza indicates the absolute self-confidence of the speaking subject and there is no reflection of the inner duality that he as a character suffered from as represented in the primary text. The river flowing by and the setting sun are merely parts of a painted canvas which form a visual backdrop to the whole narrative whereas in the Bangla version they, imbued as they are with a living force, assume the form of a character. The mythic overtones parallel the destiny of the human condition of Karna and Kunti and to an informed, native reader, the cultural conditioning enables a conceptual communion that is otherwise impossible to make.

The absence of the word *mata* and the semanteme *radha-garbha-jata* 'born from Radha's womb' is a crucial one as the essential connection that one makes at the very opening of the narrative is subverted because the crisis that emerges in the translation is external rather than internal in nature. The relation between a mother and her son is not merely a biological question of asserting one's identity. It is rather the question of finding one's moorings and it is a quest for the very source of one's own existence. The play on the word *garbha* meaning 'womb / uterus' is indicative of the fact that Karna who knew Radha to be his adopted mother and had heard rumours relating to his birth accepts his own identity in terms of their social position and yet he is unable to contain himself within the parameter of being a charioteer like his father. The in-born nobility in him makes him question his source and yearn for the knowledge about the identity of his mother both literally and metaphorically; hence, his meditative stance by the river Jahnabi or

Ganges, which does not have the same connotation as discussed earlier.

The conflict in the translation is therefore one between Karna's character and Kunti's character. The propositions are structured in a way that creates a universe of co-relations that are external to the psychic development of the characters. The idea that although Karna and Kunti are in an oppositional role and yet they are held together as a unity since they are bound by the relationship of mother and son who are essentially in dialogue with each other (as suggested even by the title in the primary text) is reduced to the idea of *Karna and Kunti* as per the title in the translated version. The conflict then develops into one of denial of mere rights whether it is access to maternal sentiments, filial bonding and kinship ties, royal name or lineage, title, wealth and even kingdom. Karna has been bereft of all that he could have had or called his own because Kunti has abandoned him at birth and now as a matter of honour he could not accept her offer of reconciliation. His rejection is then a protest exclusively against his mother's sin and he needn't be then called either *danavir* Karna or *kaninputra* Karna. It would have been ideal to have followed his name as *Basusen*, but Tagore chose otherwise in the original text as the conflict for him was an internal one, one that percolated deep down to the protagonist's subconscious.

The Second Thematic Configuration: The Concept of Conflict vs. the Concept of Curse

In the source text, the conflict is centred within the mind of Karna who is torn between the desire to prolong the sweet nature of the re-union with his mother Kunti and the objective conditions of his life that make it imperative for him to withdraw from a career that helped nurse the hate and thereby sustain an angry resistance to his existential being that forced him to keep alive the meditative core of his inner self. It is the series of mediations that make him ultimately decide that renunciation is the only dharma that he can

pursue, not as a matter of external honour but because that is where his psychic self can find the peace of a mother's womb in the depth of his inner consciousness. The communion with *sandhya sabita* is completed at the end of the narrative and like the story of Bhagirath guiding the waters of river Ganges to the site where the mortal remains of the sons of King Sagara lay he too is guided by the light of an inner wisdom that releases him from the obsessive hatred against the Pandavas when Kunti reveals to him the truth about his identity.

The conflict within Karna was the search for the source as exemplified metaphorically through the desire of trying to know his mother and when he realizes who she really was, he seems to be at peace but is troubled by the question of why she chose to reveal it to him just before the battle that he was supposed to command began. Kunti's intentions were obvious and it is reflected through the first and second ensembles of the second sequence where she makes it clear that she had a prayer which she wanted her son to grant. The earlier references to Karna as "child" changes for the first time to "son" to embody the idea that she was using her motherhood to make him (her adult son) commit something which he otherwise would not. And Karna grants the prayer even before knowing what it was because it was the dharma, the obligatory moral duty of a son, to do so, and when Kunti asks him to accompany her to the opposite bank where the Pandava camps were, he knows quite well that his dharma as a warrior would not allow him to grant her request. And hence her objective is fulfilled. Karna assures the safety of the Pandavas, and like a true seer, claims that his inner eye told him on whose side victory lay. Replete with the knowledge of what the future had in store for him he chooses to go ahead in the war and asks his mother willingly now to abandon him like she had when he was an infant and again at a juncture when he needed her the most.

Against this is posed the idea of the curse in the English translation which says that human action is not determined by free will but by the action of forces that are beyond one's control. Arjuna is his "antagonist" (P.304) and Kunti was indeed the "mother of Arjuna" (P.304) and not Karna. It is this realization that extends a thematic continuum to the earlier conceptual configuration of conflict in the translation and carries forward the idea of the curse: "*I am dogged by a curse more deadly than your reproaches*" (P.307) whereas the idea of *abhishap* - 'curse' is more in the nature of punishment due to a sin that Kunti had committed and therefore the son whom she had abandoned has now grown into adulthood and has returned to take revenge by drawing the blood of his brothers. The notion of Arjuna being the "antagonist" does not merely contribute to the addition of necessary information to the reader but it changes the whole universe of signification and contradicts the psychic tenor of Karna as understood by the mythical tradition in which he is embedded, making the understanding of the character possible in a different linguistic and cultural context.

The curse that Kunti talks about in the primary text does not have the same semantic contours as in the translation. The term *abhishap* could be either in the form of a consequence of an action or false accusation or even sin, which returns to vitiate the life of an individual. The notion of curse in the Greek sense is the idea of the utterance of a deity or a person invoking a deity to doom a person to destruction. The latter sense is also relevant in the Indian epic tradition. The use of the word by Tagore in Bangla however indicates the former and not the latter because Kunti had conceived all her sons through the divine boon of Durbasha Muni and it is her act of trying to experiment with it as a maiden that led to the birth of Karna and the boon became a curse in return. But without the same boon she could not have become the mother of the Pandavas either as King Pandu was cursed by the copulating deer whom he disturbed during the act and got cursed by them (in the Greek sense of the word), the curse being that he would die the moment he attempted

conjugal union and the curse comes true when he is unable to restrain himself sexually when he sees his younger wife Madri bathing and this becomes the cause of his death. The duality of divine wisdom and the double-edged nature of a boon that becomes a curse and vice-versa is something fundamental to the philosophy of Karma or human action which alone is the true testing ground for the actualization of the will of the Providence. But in the translation when Kunti mentions it, she tries to give some reason of causality that made her feel motherless even after becoming the mother of five sons as she had abandoned Karna at birth and she knew no happiness or peace because of her knowledge of the sin she had committed to avoid social defamation for being a maiden mother. Which is to say that the translation only carries the partial significance of the idea and is not able to convey the whole idea as it is found in the original due to the distinctively different cultural and linguistic structures in which the author/translator is operating.

The Third Thematic Configuration: The Concept of Resignation vs. the Concept of Defeat

The concluding sequence of the narrative is the culmination of the earlier thematic units of identity and conflict wherein Karna questions his legitimacy and refuses to acknowledge that he has the divine sanction of asserting his rights as son, elder brother and even king. Kunti's enticing offer of the kingdom fails to veer him from his path of duty. It in fact makes him question her as to what right he had to usurp from his brothers the love of their mother when they have been denied even their rightful claims over the throne of Hastinapur. He was the first-born - *jestha* - and so he had the duties of the first-born and like a true Brahman, the one who has conquered all desires of the world, he decides not to snatch away from them even their mother's love. The word *horon* (meaning 'usurp') is central here because it indicates that Karna unlike Kunti would not

be able to swerve from the path of his duty even though he knew what the consequences would be. He grants her the prayer and assures her that her five Pandava sons would remain safe as victory would be on the side of the righteous. The revelation of his identity makes him acknowledge more firmly that he was the son of the charioteer and his mother was Radha and the re-statement of the obvious in the fourth sequence helps him to withdraw from the turmoil of a life that thrived/throve on the emotion of anger and hate. The silence all-around enables him to resign to a life of action, which despite its futility and meaninglessness, would assure him of returning to the path where his karma leads. *birer sadgati* - 'heroic end/death' is what he desires and that is possible only when he has conquered all desires of this world. The passage to eternal life is possible only through the good, positive/liberating end (*sadgati*) to one's life by the giving up of all claims to the material/physical world. The *sabita-bandana* 'worship of the Sun God' has helped him renounce the world of love, anger, hatred, success and defeat. And now no longer is there any need for him to be baffled and confused with anything. He could return to the source of his primal existence and in the embalmed darkness that surrounded him he wanted only one blessing from Kunti and that was the fulfilment of the desire to be free from all bondage whatsoever after fulfilling his obligations to those with whom he was associated - the Kauravas and his foster parents, Adhiratha the charioteer and his wife Radha. It is with that blessing of Kunti, the mother that his quest was complete with the understanding of how futile his conflict was, how meaningless his endeavour to win a battle against his own brothers and the final recognition of the fact regarding his identity and the realization that his desire to establish communion with the source of his existence (mother and the ideal embodied in the cosmic principle of life itself) could be fulfilled by annihilating the notion of the self by withdrawing into the contemplative being of his inner consciousness - the final womb of the universe from which all life truly began, finds sustenance, and finally returns to.

Contrary to this is the idea of "defeat and death" that appears in the translation and the misery of one who had once thought of being able to lead the Kaurava forces to a decisive victory over the Pandavas and thus fulfil the dharma of a kshatriya or warrior. The connotation of honor in the notion of dharma and its equation to that of the honour of a Kshatriya is not a problem of translation for Tagore, but the problem of trying to communicate concepts embedded within the oriental tradition which embodies within it the matrix of a cultural history that is three thousand years old. The veneration of core philosophical concepts and its intrusion into lived practices and customs are part of the collective subjectivity of a people and its universalizing role gives it a transcendence that cuts across all material / physical divisions and consequently, the micro-formations within it. The defeat and death of Karna is possible in the translation and ironically it is the only possibility if one works within the colonial subjectivity of a language and culture that Tagore for one was not unaware of. In fact that was one reason why he had refused to translate his works into English at one point of time but later agreed to the idea. He began by translating parts of the *Gitanjali* while aboard a ship sailing to America, agreeing to translate because he felt the need to communicate ideas to the western audience and subvert the context of domination by working within the parameters of the hegemonic language of the oppressor race.

Karna's ego-centricity in the first sequence of the translated text makes his final end in death and defeat plausible as what he emerges to be is in keeping with the notion of the tragic hero who accepts his fate as there was no alternative. The notion of *birer sadgati* - 'heroic end' does not find any resonance in the translation presumably because the idea of *sadgati* or 'good positive/liberating end' is inconceivable to the West. The ordering of the narrative follows a unidirectional trajectory that reaches its culmination when Kunti and Karna struggle over the issue of why he was abandoned

by his mother as "a castaway uprooted from... ancestral soil, adrift in a homeless current of indignity?" (P. 306) The reference to the "curse" makes Kunti's answer plausible and it takes care of Tagore's concern of trying to communicate to an audience unacquainted with the story of the *Mahabharata* and therefore the curse provides an external agency which Kunti can hold responsible for her deplorable action of abandoning infant Karna in the hope that somebody would find the baby and take pity on him. So now she feels she can ask her son to take pity on his 'remorseful mother' (P. 307) and implore him for "generous words" (P. 307) which is not the same as the idea of *khama* - 'pardon' (as in the original) that would penetrate her guilt-ridden conscience worse than his angry allegations and it is in that fire of remorse that she would be able to purify her being. The "curse" of the mother extends to stifle the destiny of the son, relentlessly pushing him towards a future from which there is no redemption. The certain conviction of Karna makes him well prepared to calmly expect his end much in keeping with the tragic tone of Greek narratives. Whereas the primary text in Bangla uses the idea of calm serenity and darkness to which he resigns to return as by making communion with the eternal womb of consciousness Karna can find sanction in the heroic tradition ("vira") of the orient which envisions release as liberation from the cycle of life.

The Dialectics of Human Intellection

Language and culture have a relational autonomy and the mind fashions images not in the negation of the material world but in comprehension of the objectivity that determines the subjective domain both of the conscious and the unconscious. The translation paradox and the problem of authenticity that theoretical discourse tries to articulate has to be located within an understanding of the relational autonomy of the individual mind both in its conscious and unconscious states and the role of the socio-cultural structure of the languages in use. Transfer of concepts that have roots in the lived history of the people fashion the subconscious mind of the artist as

creator and Tagore as both the author and translator is seen at his best trying to grapple with the problem of communication within two cultural and linguistic entities of the narratives embedded within two different domains of reality. Tagore realized this problem and was aware of the difficulties involved and in a letter to Ajit Kumar Chakravarti (13 March 1913) written from Illinois, USA, he wrote: 'What I try to capture in my English translation is the heart and core of my original Bengali. That is bound to make for a fairly wide deviation. If I were not there to help you out, you might probably find it impossible to identify the original in the translation' (Ray, 1913: 124). As the poet admits, there is a wide deviation. One needs to analyse the reasons as to why it happens. Questions like, is it the failure of the poet as a translator of his own works? or is it a problem of human intellection per se? need to be addressed.

On the one hand, the difference between the source text and the translated one is the result of the compulsions of the different subjectivities of the author operating within the socio-cultural collective of two different linguistic domains. In the Bangla text, the author is conscious of the nuances he is developing in the articulation of the character of Karna. He is concerned not only with the aspect of Karna in the Brahminical tradition but rather he is focussed on the aspect of *daanavir Karna* 'Karna the Magnanimous', or 'Karna the Munificent' of popular folk tradition and the character thus becomes the symbol of resistance to the injustice of the circumstances in which he is born. The final triumph of the protagonist lies in being able to find the path towards the communion with the immortal order of things as opposed to the mortal order in which he had been so long trapped since he willingly resigns from the quest of victory. Contrary to this, the Karna of the English translation is embedded in the heroic tradition of the West and is much in keeping with the Greek genre of tragedy. Consequently in the translated narrative, the governing psychic order

undergoes a slow disintegration as Karna asks Kunti to abandon him once more to the "calm expectation of defeat and death" (P. 308) - *parabhab pore* . But the idea contained in the last two lines of the Bangla original that turns a final moment of defeat to victory, finds no place in the translation as it does not agree with the governing conceptual universe of the West as a construct in the mind of the poet. The space occupied by the primary narrative in Bangla changes in form as well as in the organization of the content when the text is translated into English because even when the author/translator is the same person, his governing subjectivity at the level of the conscious and the unconscious aspects of his mind is not the same. The colonized subconscious surfaces in the translator but not in the author of the primary text and we therefore find him trying to translate concepts in a form that is comprehensible in the target linguistic community rather than playing around with the language to make it malleable and suitable to communicate concepts that are alien to it.

Translation was taken up by Tagore quite late in his career, at the age of fifty-one to be precise. He started translating, goaded by his friends from diverse backgrounds when he was already an established figure in Bangla literature. According to Sisir Kumar Das' introduction to *The English Writings of Tagore*, Volume One, published by the Sahitya Academi in 1994, what seems to have changed Tagore's career altogether was his interaction with William Rothenstein. It was on a demand by the English reading clientele that he formally engaged in the translation of his works, which gave him the place he deserved in world literature. Unlike the intellectuals of his times, Tagore never faced the crisis of a language choice and he embarked on the act of translating his own works while writing a few things in English and then translating them into Bangla, chasing the possibility of a wider audience and interaction, and today he is known outside the country because of the translations of his English works in other languages. But at the same time it is an irony of the colonial predicament that the author, who claimed that the natural

language of a creative writer was his/her own mother tongue fell prey to the same governing subjectivity in his translation of the narrative discussed before. The act of colonization creates an oppressive order but it is sustained not through oppression but the consent gathered through the process of acculturation whereby the language which was an alien medium for the act of communication at one point of time becomes or may become the natural language of expression at another historical conjuncture as the act of appropriation frees it from the constraint of being the domain of the other. But Tagore had to contend with the otherness of the English language as articulated in the numerous letters that figure in his biography and it is this that he constantly grapples with when he is translating the narrative and trying to come to terms with the boon and bane of a western enlightenment to which the whole Brahmo Samaj movement owed its roots. And yet it is his consciousness as the son of the soil that makes his writings rooted in the cultural tradition to which he is born and gives him the stature of a universal poet.

Conclusion

In an attempt to answer the question that I raised at the very outset regarding the translation paradox, one has to examine how far the conditioning of one's subjectivity is responsible for the conscious as well as unconscious articulation in a literary narrative of the human condition and to what extent the transfer of ideas from one cultural space to the other is possible. The answer to this riddle lies in understanding that the act of translation being a form of 'transaction' or 'negotiation' (to borrow a concept used by Umberto Eco in 2003), the exchange is always an unequal one, as the literary text in the source domain and the target domain operate differently as they are governed by the structural logic of two cultural contours that stand in a situation of relational autonomy in a certain power

paradigm. With reference to the narratives discussed before, it is apparent that the act of intervention would have been possible if Tagore had tried to translate the source text in terms of its distinctive universe and not the other way round. Despite the heightened kind of consciousness that a bi-lingual author/translator like Tagore has, it is interesting to see that the criticality with which he viewed the West does not enable him to overcome the barriers of a socio-political space determined by the colonial discourse and instead he transmutes the narrative into one that fits in with the western paradigm and what is more, agrees with his own understanding of what the west is in terms of a monolith. In fact he acknowledged the problem of translating his own writings in a letter to Ajit Kumar Chakravarti when he said, "My English writing emerges out of my subconscious... Once I mount the peak of conscious will all my wit and wisdom get muddled. That is why I cannot but gird up my loins to do a translation. I can only set my boat adrift and not sit at the helm of it all. Then, if and when I touch shore I cannot quite understand myself how it all happened" (12 May, 1913, translated by Kshitis Ray, *Jadavpur Journal of Comparative Literature*, Vol.9, P.125-26). The mythic archetypes that he uses in the original are not untranslatable if one agrees with Levi-Strauss' reading of the 'Structure of the Myth': "Whatever our ignorance of the language and the culture of the people where it originated, a myth is still felt as a myth by any reader anywhere in the world. Its substance does not lie in its style, its original music, or its syntax, but in the story which it tells. . ." (Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology: The Structural Study of Myth*). And as an author who rejected the award of knighthood at one point of time in his life, as an expression of nationalism, paradoxically falls prey to the unconscious subjectivity that has conditioned in him a fixed idea of the West as well as an aura about western enlightenment which acts as an insurmountable barrier that impedes the process of translation of his own works into English. It is at the same time important to note here that the crisis that Tagore underwent never made him uncritical of the aura that enthralled him and it is this consciousness that made

him wage a continuous struggle against the colonial hegemony in operation (See his essay *Shabhyatar Shankat* 'The Crisis of Civilisation'). What then emerges as a consequence are two different narrative orders that use the same theme, but the universe of signification that is created changes completely as they are governed by the ideologies and thought-movements of two different culture-systems expressed in two different languages shaping the subjectivity of the author-cum-translator whose potential autonomy is in no way independent of the material/historical context. Keeping the authenticity question aside it is therefore important to re-read Tagore comparatively, both as author and as translator and come to terms with the paradox that underwrites the act of reflection. With the recent withdrawal of the copyright that Bishwabharati had on the writings of the poet we have already entered another era of the possibilities of reading and translating the works of Tagore using the freedom that the earlier copy-right situation did not permit. Being an unabashed Tagorephile, I cannot suppress the optimism that is opened up by doing away with institutional regulations that restricted the tradition of Tagorean thought by always circumscribing it to rules about authenticity, and despite all the risks involved, the poet's writings must be returned to the world community where it belongs, as perhaps, he too wanted it to be. An interesting area of academic study would be to compare English translations of Tagore's works done by others in the 21st century to Tagore's own English Translations and see how the politics of the postcolonial serves to be a testing ground of re-aligning languages and cultures creating in the bargain a hybridity that was earlier not possible because it was the critical phase, the phase of preparation needed to write an Indian History of the English Language.

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