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# Translating the ‘translated’: Women’s Poetry in Translation

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Anamika

## Abstract

*With her project of translating Hindi women poets into English Arlene Zide, a Fullbright scholar and a poet of eminence, she met a couple of us. This article is rooted in a new shade of sisterhood that we both experienced in our exploration of poems. Working with her one realized that a white woman’s burden is starkly different from a white man’s burden because the motto here is not to dictate terms but to enter into a meaningful dialogue, decode culture and unravel different layers of self-imposed and super-imposed censorships which women suffer the world over primarily because of their good girl syndrome, a performance complex and a hidden urge to excel in all relationships, forgive as much as they can, bear it all with grace and dignity. The sum and substance of all this is to resist washing dirty linen in public. Traveling with texts, we realized that in feminist poetry language equals home. It is home as surely as a roof over one’s head is home, the place where our bodies and minds collide, where our groundedness in place and time and our capacity for fantasy and invention must come to terms.*

All women live in camps. There is a camp in every house on the earth which can be bombed down at the slightest pretext. All women live on platforms from where they can be hounded out any day like unlicensed coolies. All such people who live on the fringes and can be bogged down or hounded out at the slightest pretext, all

who have to '*adapt*' themselves and adjust according to the needs and demands of the Big Bosses, the Great Originals can be called '*translated beings*,' and it is not in Rushdie's<sup>1</sup> sense of the term that one is using the word here. Being a second rate citizen in America is one thing and suffering a second rate citizenship in one's own land, among one's own people is another

Lohe ka swad lohar se mat poocho  
 us ghore se poocho jiske munh mein lagam hai! <sup>2</sup>  
 Translated hone ka matlab Rushdi se mat poocho  
 us aurat, us musalman, us bhangin se poocho jo apne ghar mein  
 beghar hai.

To give you the feel of this "translation" one would begin one's paper with the English rendering of one's Hindi poem "*Anuwad*" and before one does that one would also like to clarify that in the '*arena*' of the '*translated beings*' lie not only the women, the poor and the dispossessed, the dalit, the minorities, the blacks but also the old, the sick, the cripples, the small towners, villagers, translators and all the marginalized sections of this merde'-merde' world of public and private breakdowns. The poem, which contains the abstract of the point I am making, runs as follows:

#### Translation

People are going away  
 Each one from the other  
 People are going away  
 And the space around me is expanding.  
 I translate this 'space'

Not as 'breathing space'  
 But 'outer space'  
 Because I sent my flying saucers out there.  
 Thank you, time  
 My watch has stopped  
 Thank you, window

Just behind the grille a sparrow  
 Is ready to lay her eggs.  
 Whoever, wherever, thanks to all of you  
 This is the time you're all within me  
 I, a little bit in each of you.  
 The harmonium of my empty house  
 Whines its moaning silence  
 This empty time is  
 Filled with work  
 This is the time when I must translate  
 Dirty linen into the dialect of water  
 Then a little while, stand still and think  
 If a sinkful of soapy water  
 Can be translated  
 Into the melody of a raga  
 Frankly, this whole house  
 I'd like to translate  
 Into some other language.  
 But where will I find this language  
 Except in the babblings of my children.  
 By the time I finish, it's evening  
 I'll translate this evening into drawing the curtains  
 The splinters of last light  
 Will fill up all the space  
 I'll translate those splinters  
 Not into outer space  
 But into my breathing space.

[Translation from Hindi by Arlene Zide and the poet Anamika]

### **Translational and Transnational: Beyond Boundaries**

Translation is a revelation, a friendship between poets and also an act of criticism. The translator begins with the advantage of selecting the poem that leads itself to her translation. This editorial choice is formidable.

In the light of the common woman's angst hinted at in the poem aforementioned, one would wish to share an experience or two

of translating Hindi women's poetry into English. But before that one would like to lay down the basic paradigms one has tried to follow:

- Because women face many layers of cultural censorship, deconstructing their text isn't that easy. The act of unveiling the text tries the patience of real love.
- The translation of a poet, unlike that of a scientist, cannot be a word by word rendering of the text. It's an art of *parakaya-pravesh* 'transmigration' and not the surgical procedure of organ transplantation. It is an x-ray and not a xerox.
- Because it's a 'sakhee' talking to another 'sakhee' – translation here is not only a translingual but also a transformational activity. The target here is to reach the core.
- As a feminist translator one would hate to use the word 'domesticate' because there is some violence implicit in it. Even if the target language is one's own, one would not cherish the wish of domesticating the source language like a 'cow'. Translating from English into Hindi is fun. It's like playing hop-skotch with an old friend, an old sakhee. Translating from Hindi into English is also fun but that fun is akin more to the pleasures of playing a cross word puzzle which teases, irritates, challenges and at last boils down to a prestige issue. Still, one resists domestication.

At best one could make it feel at home the way one would make sisters from the other side of the world feel at home if someday they visit our 'angan', 'panchayat', 'chaupal', 'dehri', 'chaubara', 'zenana' or any of these WDC offices in India. We would offer them all that we cook but if it doesn't go with their system, we won't force it down their throat. This is no hospitality: forcing things down the throat, and this is what we have suffered down the ages, so resist we must unless left with no choice.

As feminist translators we also resist a male translator's positivist maneuvering of 'civilizing' the *text*. Ramanujam is a poet-translator of eminence, but when he sits down to translate 'Channa Mallikarjuna' figuring in Akka Mahadevi, the 12th century Kannada Vachana poetess's signature line as '*a white jasmine like Shiva*', one sits wondering why, under which colonial hang up should '*channa*' or '*red*' jasmine be transformed into the 'white' of the colonial master. '*Channa*' is a word of Dravidian origin, 'Mallika' in Sanskrit stands for the pliable feminine principle as does '*Arjun*' for the masculine. A delicate balance of the two in the '*Ardhanareeshwar*' is very well taken care of by '*Mallikarjuna*'. There was no need at all of translating the proper noun for quick consumption in the West. Why should the colonial master deny the subject his name too?

Another very important case in point is H.V.Shivprakash's gender-neutral rendering Akka Mahadevi's tenth verse where she visualizes '*maya*' as '*man*'. All the saint poets, Kabir included, have associated '*maya*' with women: '*Maya Mahathagini main jani*' but Akka gives '*Maya*' a full fledged moustache. As Shiv Prakash himself admitted, his rendering somehow became '*gender-blind*'. On my insistence he read it aloud and I noted it down thus:

“Ugh, this empty show of the world!  
 First of all comes the masked child  
 Saying, “O Daddy, O Papa”.  
 In this middle comes one  
 Moustached mask  
 As if daubed with ghee  
 At the end comes  
 The mask of old-old age  
 The moment your eyesight ceases  
 The play of the world ends  
 O Channamallikarjuna!”<sup>3</sup>

Before I could muse on the point of how important it is for a woman to translate woman or play her midwife, he revised the text, "*O no, as I read it today, it struck me that I could easily retain the 'gendered' flavour of Akka by converting the masked 'child' into a 'masked male child' and 'the mask of the old-old age' into that of the 'old-old man!'*" "*This is called sensitization*", both of us laughed. Only a Gayatri Spivak would know how a '*wet nurse*' can be no substitute for '*a breast giver*'! Only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches.

Responding to Spivak's charge of Western feminist exploitation of the third world women's text,<sup>4</sup> and responding also to Bulmer Josephine's suggestion of evoking the various silences of the hitherto untranslated feminist poems in different linguistic regions of the world,<sup>5</sup> I and Arlene decided to deconstruct some of Hindi women poets by way of translating their lesser known texts.

### **Post-Colonial Feminist Translation: 'Only Connect'**

This we all understand viz. that feminist theory is eclectic: post-colonial in the hunt of the unofficial, off-the-record primary sources, Marxist in the perception of a non-sectarian, non-hierarchical development model and post-structuralist in its notions of language and identity or of its emphasis on refiguring the powerful and sexually expressive relation between psyche and language.

As a bourgeois academic at one point we are also addressed by the liberal humanist version of empowering "*inner resources*" feminism which points to a substantial human essence transcending all forms of socio-economic power play, and then suddenly as sensitive women inhabiting complex multilayered realities, we feel that empowering the inner resources is not enough. Ours is basically a transformative politics with the potential to make change towards a more equitable society. If it may be called an ideology in the

established sense of the term, it is an ideology of support for those who are deprived and exploited by the institutionalized structure and hierarchy on the one hand and its constant battle against division and isolationism on the other.

Poems can best be treated as intellectual, emotional routes by which one comes to Feminism. Poems of the early twentieth century can be approached under the rubric of the daily maintenance politics and those of the late twentieth century under rubric of surgical operation kind! In either case they are poems dialing relational reality, relating the painful moments in personal lives to more general historical or cultural complexities in the brilliant metaphysical flash of lightning and rain!

### **Women's Poetry in Our Part of the World**

Poets are always suspected and a woman poet of the third world more than others. Her subjects may seem superficially women's subjects, yet the point is not the subject but the way she questions the subject. Because all women live in tents and because they are all essentially dispossessed, the figure of the immigrant or refugee becomes an insistent subject for women's poetry, and this is what gives all their writings a political aura. Like any other kind of political poetry, it prompts a deep questioning of identity and affiliation and goes out to affirm that the hand that rocks the cradle can also rock the system. Contemporary women's poetry at least negotiates and questions both meanings of this pun rather than choosing a single way of '*rocking*' the world.

Good adapters as they essentially are, women poets easily adopt multiple identities in order to escape from a single national identity, become stateless, even alien, in order to record a history of oppression. Interestingly this is not a narcissistic '*history*' but an analysis of forgotten or invisible social exclusion where a thing as objective as history also has been subjectified through the techniques

of telescoping which merges the micro with the macro and the cosmic with the commonplace.

Four hundred years after Bharat Muni, performance still attract rapt audiences, they understand. We live in times difficult for creative verbal arts but great for performing arts. So, most of these make the most of sound bytes and visual images drawn from everyday life and in a way they make us hear through eyes and see through ears. As singers both of lullabies and of *bhairavies*, most of them understand that speech rhythms are the unconscious engines of poetry, the pulse or muscle that govern it and also that they have their physical sources in commonplace activities like walking, breathing and heart beat. Though rhythm is more kinaesthetic than aesthetic, it is felt and shared like an emotion, and the energy that drives poetry is the beat, as in the drumbeat (heartbeat) of primitive ritual and dance! In a literate cosmopolitan society with a proliferation of media, the available myths and discourses are much more various and intermeshed than of an oral group, and our poetry is formed of a neutrally controlled range of discourses which the individual writer of poetry appropriates or subverts or enters. This process is perhaps more usually and usefully talked about either as intertextuality or, more politically, as in colonial criticism, as 'writing back' to a dominant form.

All poetry rewrites other texts and the surge of women's poetry this century specifically rewrites myths and folk tales.

Remember Ali Baba. 'Open sesame', said he and the cave opened up, unfolding all his treasures to him. The key mantra to approach the third world's women's poetry is what is called '*biomythography*'. It's a coinage trying to charter the hitherto unexplored twilight zone, the '*no man's land*' falling outside the fringes of a regimented biography, history and mythology where memory plays the role of the prime mover.

This memory approaches you with open arms and helps you activate and revive your own memory. This activation is important. The big rock on the mouth of the cave won't open up unless this memory is revived. Unless this memory is revived, we simply can't enter the privilege to dream and to create counterlives.

Once rekindled it metaphorises all personal losses into the collective losses of language, culture, identity and home. Globalization, with its gilli-gilli-appa effects, (the effect akin to that of Harry Potter's magic world) has turned practically the whole of the 'other' world into a world of nomads. Culturally threatened that all of us are, language itself now equals home, it is a home, as surely as a roof over one's head is a home, the place where our bodies and minds collide, where our groundedness in place and time and our capacity for fantasy and invention must come to terms. Women's poetry is especially sensitive to this. Each and every turn of the phrase, each and every departure in the feminist mould is meaningful. The push and joy of the language with which third world women's poetry combats the '*Poor Liza Complex*' of the yesteryears is remarkable indeed. It successfully refutes even the hierarchy of sense and nonsense, high and low by the cheerful juxtaposition of the ordinary and the extraordinary.

All forceful women poets give birth to words flowing in accord with the contractual rhythms of labour. This combats the brutally impersonal authority effects of the magisterial father tongue. Father tongue is spoken from above. It goes one way. No answer is expected or heard.

Because the father-tongue is lectures, only lectures, woman's language has got to be conversation, a word, the root of which means turning together, moving in loops and curves like sparrows glissading, bursting with geothermal energies to establish a full fledged relationship and bursting also with anger, an old anger,

which is, in fact the best anger, the meanest, the truest, the most intense:

“Every baby born  
Involved, unwanted is a bill that will come due in twenty  
years with interest.  
I will choose what enters me, what becomes flesh of my  
flesh... I am not your corn field, nor your uranium mine,  
not your calf for fattening, not your cow for milking. You  
may not use me as your factory.” (Right to Life: Margie  
Pierce)

Old anger of this kind is pure because it has been dislocated from its source for so long and has had the chance to ferment. The third world women's poem is fuelled by this very anger. It is a motivator, an explainer, a justifier. Political action and great languages have always been motivated by this unconscious anger of people misused, imprisoned, exploited, crumpled, drilled and silenced, people like Meera and Mahadevi and all the poets of the early years who couldn't speak without masks, who told the truth/ but told it slant,' who had to operate behind the purdas of bhakti, myths parables, riddles and puns to fight that good girl syndrome which glamorizes feminine mystique and the '*aesthetics of silence*' beyond limits and makes one believe that only the second rate and the underclass (prostitutes, witches and slave girls) breach the gap between the private and the public.

As students of post structuralism we also understand that culture, history, family and self are inextricably layered like Suleman's documents, or inseparably folded into each other. So, the Berlin wall between the personal and the political, the cosmic and the common place, the rural and the urban, the East and the West, the '*ghore*' and the '*bahire*', the sacred and the profane, the body and the soul, the subjective and the objective must be pulled down and the tears in the heart of things must be telescoped in the minutest details, the melancholy and angst of life captured through pulsating

word-pictures which surface the idea with the magic not of the extraordinary but the most ordinary of things and nothings of life, things and nothings like birth, copulation and death!

Love, death, home, mothering, sisterhood and the angst of being are six grey areas staging a Copernical shift after the advent of feminist poetry. Like telescopes that bring distant things closer, feminist poetry usually opens with the large historical fact of collective expulsion and exile, alienation and holocaust and then they narrow down to the most ultimate of chit chats.

### **Examples with a Note of Apology:**

Propriety demands that for illustration I refer to poems other than mine. I have translated many from English into Hindi and vice-versa but my handicap is that I have not yet received the permission to publish them formally. Most of them are lying either with the co-translators or with the original writers. In the absence of the formal permission slip, I am doomed to refer to the experience of translating my own poems with Arlene Zide, a Jewish American scholar and linguist who was here last year on her Full-bright project of translating the Hindi women poets.

### **Translating the ‘Other’ in Me**

There is an ‘other’ in the inner folds of my own being. She is a fence sitter. She sits aloof on the fence of her Eden, eating her forbidden apples and sour guavas, all very delightfully. She doesn’t listen to me. And she is sovereign: difficult to tame and translate: “*Maya Mahadhagini Mai Jami*”. Only a yogi like Tagore can dare tackle and translate this shatroopa Maya, this ‘other’ hiding behind the ‘*ghoonghat*’ of one’s own being. Tagore know his Kabeer well and understood the reverberations of ‘*Ghoonghat ke pat khol re took peeva milenge.*’ My Peeva, the essential is lost for ever, I suppose, but my quest for the ‘*Peeva*’ manifest in interpersonal relationships

is alive still. This explains why I have decided to concentrate basically on my experience of translating the 'other' in me, of snapping into that 'other' with the click of a 'chut' as in 'chutputia'. This is one poem where I tackled the other both in me and in 'others' with some success. Basically it was Arlene's idea of retention that worked, and here you can judge for yourself how actually it worked:

My brother explained this to me:  
 Stars  
 Are the snap-buttons sewn on the jacket of night.  
 In my part of the world, snaps  
 Were called *chutputia*  
 Because with the click of a 'chut' one snapped into the other  
 They only worked when all four eyelets on both sides matched up.  
 They had no faith in the high and the low  
 Advocates of equality  
 Neither hooking nor getting hooked up  
 Came together without a fuss  
 In my part of the world  
 Snaps were called 'chutputia'  
 But even the people from my part of the world  
 Behave like snaps.  
 No chutputia here in this alien city  
 Like sweet gourd, satputia jhigune  
 You just can't find them, can't find them anywhere.  
 Chutputia people and chutputia snaps  
 On sari blouses,  
 Tailors in the city sew on hooks, not snaps  
 And there's always a gap  
 Between the hook and the snare of the eyes.  
 No matter how hard you try  
 There'll be no click of 'chut' and no 'put'.  
 Mera bhai mujhko samjhakar kehtha tha – 'Janti hai, Poonam  
 Tare' hain chutputia button,  
 Rat ke angherkhe main take hue!  
 Meri taraf press-button ko

Chutputia button kaha jata tha  
 Kyonki 'chut' se kewal ek bar 'put' baj kar  
 Ek doosre mein sama jate the Ve!  
 Ve tabhi tak hote the kam ke  
 Jab tak unka sathi  
 Charon khoonton se barabar  
 Unke bilkul samne rahe takan hua.  
 Oonch-neeche ke darshan mein unka  
 Koi vishwas nahin tha!  
 Barabari kevek kayal the!  
 Phanste the na phansate the  
 Chupchap sat jate the  
 Meri taraf press-button ko  
 Chutputia button kaha jata tha  
 Lekin meri taraf ke log khud bhi the  
 Chutputia button ki tarah  
 'Chut' se 'put' bajkar sat jane wale  
 Is shahar mein lekin chutputia  
 Nazar hi nahin aate  
 Satputiajhinguni ke tarah yahan ek sire se ghayab hain  
 Chutputia jan aur button  
 Blowse mein bhi darzi dete hain tak yahan  
 Hook hi hook,  
 Har hook ke age virajmaan hota  
 Hai phanda!  
 Phande mein phanse hue aapas mein kitna satenge  
 Kitna bhi keejiye jatan  
 'Chut' se 'put' nahin hi bajenge."

Many an example could be cited of language merging into one another like two sister rivers of different origins. There is a poem in Hindi which reads:

Main ek darwaja thee  
 Mujhe jitna peeta gaya  
 Main utna khulti gayi  
 Andar aye ane wale to dekha  
 Chal raha hai ek vrihat chakra

Chakki rukti hai to charcha chalta hai  
 Charkha rukta hai to chalti hai kaichi-sui  
 Gharaj yah ki chalta hi rahta hai anwarat kuch-kuch  
 Aur ant mein sab par jati hai jharoo  
 Tare buharti hui buharti hui pahar, wrikcha patthar  
 Sristi ke sab toote bikhre katre jo  
 Ek tokri mein jama karti jati hai  
 Man ki ducchatti par.

I was supposed to translate this and I got stuck at '*peeta gaya*'. The words '*knocked*' and '*knocked down*' could not be merged together in English and Ritu Menon helped me out by handing over the plain and simple '*beat me*', and now the lines read,

"I was a door/ the harder they beat me/ the wider I opened."

My *vrihat chakra* she insightfully translated as '*a cosmic whirligig*'. For a moment I wondered if cosmic was essential, but a deeper thought made us realize that without this the line would feel lost like a babe in the woods. '*Vrihatchakra*' has an advantage over it because of the different nuances it bears:

"Chakrawat pariwartani dukhani cha sukhan I cha."

Finally it got translated thus:

I was a door  
 The more they banged on me  
 The more I opened up  
 Those who could come in, could see for themselves  
 The endless cycle  
 This whirling grindstone  
 To the spinning wheel to the needle  
 Something or other all day long, not stop  
 And the a broom  
 To sweep it all up  
 The stards, swept up

Mountains, trees, and rocks swept up  
 All the shards and wreckage dumped in an empty basket,  
 Tossed in the attic of the mind.

(Finally done by Arlene and Ritu)

The third poem that Arlene helped me translate is ‘*striiyaan*’(‘women’)! Here the stumbling blocks were ‘*chanajorgaram*’ and ‘*anhad*’: ‘*Chanajorgaram*’ was retained for its *desi* (=local) flavour. When we get invited to important places, our cards read ‘*nontransferable*’. Some words too bear the stamp of ‘*nontransferable*’. And the translator’s visa office has to be strict about retention. ‘*Anhad*’ clicked as ‘*soundless void*’ but one could do with ‘*Anhad*’ too, and at this point even the footnoting of culture would have been fine. Why is everything fair in love and war? Perhaps because a skilful warrior lover is never faithful to one set of strategies: he has a wide range to choose from: ‘*Sam-dam-dand-bhed*’ (adapt, threaten, punish, break off). And a translator should have the freedom to do the same – atleast the feminist translator, who is also a friend and a sister. She understands the deeper nuances of the poem which only a fellow sufferer can. In this very sense a feminist translator is also a fellow creator who plays into an ‘*anhad*’ or nothingness. This also I have noticed especially during my translation of other women poets: the major ones. Untranslatable lines are natural meadows of translation and yield the best with wild herbs. What has never been done in the adopted language sometimes does expand its thematic and formal boundaries. And it is through these expansions that the translator –artists recognize, recreate and reveal the work of the other artist. Even when famous at home, a translated work comes into the Alien City almost like an orphan with no past to its readers, and it is through these daring retentions, expansions and footnoting that the translator – artist makes poor Dick Wittingtons great Lord Mayors of London.

## WOMEN

We were read  
 Like the torn pages of children's notebooks  
 Made into cones to hold warm chanajor garam  
 We were looked at  
 The way grumpily you squint at your wristwatch  
 After the alarm goes off in the morning  
 We were listened to  
 Distractedly  
 The way film songs assail your ears  
 Spilling from cheap cassettes on a crowded bus  
 They sensed as  
 The way you sense the sufferings of a distant relative  
 One day we said  
 We're human too.  
 Read us carefully  
 One litter at a time  
 The way after your BA, you'd read a job ad.  
 Look at us  
 The way, shivering,  
 You'd gaze at the flames of a distant fire  
 Listen to us  
 As you would the unstruck music of the void  
 And understand the way you'd understand a newly-learned  
 language.  
 The moment they heard this  
 From an invisible branch suspended in limbo  
 Like a swam of gnats  
 Wild rumors went screeching  
 "Women without character  
 Wild vines draining the sap  
 From their hosts  
 Well-fed, bored with affluence  
 These women  
 Pointlessly on edge  
 Indulging in the luxury of writing  
 These stories and poems –

Not even their own”  
 They said, amused.  
 The rest of the stories dismissed with a wink  
 Hey, Blessed Fathers  
 You blessed men  
 Spare us  
 Spare us  
 This sort  
 Of attention.

(Translated from Hindi by Arlene and Anamika)

The original reads thus:

Parha gaya humko  
 Jaise parha jata hai kaagaz  
 Baccho ki phati copiyon ka  
 Chanazorgharam ke lifafe banana ke pehle.  
 Dekha gaya humko  
 Jaise ki kuft ho uneende  
 Dekhi jati hai kalaighari  
 Alassubah alarm bajne ke bad.  
 Suna gaya humko yonhi udte man se  
 Jaise sune jaten hai filmi gane  
 Saste cassetton par  
 Thasthassa dhunsi hui bus mein.  
 Bhoga gaya humko bahut door ke rishtedaron  
 Ke dukh ki tarah  
 Ek din hamne kaha  
 Hambhi insa hain -  
 Hamen kayade se parho ek-ek akshar  
 Jaise parha hoga BA ke bad  
 Naukri ka pahlavigyapan!  
 Dekho to aise  
 Jaise ke thithurte hue dekhi jati hai  
 Bahut door jalti hui aag!  
 Suno hamen anhad ki tarah  
 Aur sumjho jaise samjhi jati hai  
 Nai-nai seekhi hui bhasha!

Itna sunana tha ki adhar mein latukti hui  
 Ek adrishya tahni se  
 Tiddiyan udi aur apwhahen  
 Cheekhi hui chi-chi  
 'Dushcharitra mahilayen,  
 Dushcharitra mahilayen –  
 Kinhi sarparaston kiedum par phalli-phuli  
 Agardhatta jungali latayen!  
 Khati-peeti, such se oobi  
 Aur bekar bechchain  
 Awara mahilaon ka hi shagal hain  
 Ye kahaniyan aur kavitayen!  
 Phir ye inhone thode hi likkhi hain!  
 (Kankhiyan, ishare, phir kanakhi)  
 Baki kahani bus kanakhi hai –  
 Hey Parampitao, Parampurushon –  
 Bakhsho – bakhsho – ab hamen bakhsho!  
 Conclusion : Is there Any?

I am a minor translator but I have sincerely tried to add a brick or two in the vast translational transnational project of building bridges across languages. I and Arlene have jointly translated Nagarjun, Trilochan, Shamsher, Kedarnath Agrawal, Kedarnath Singh, fellow women poets and many 'others'. And we have translated each other too.

This 'each other' factor must have been a great leveler because at the end of our intense interactive sessions I realized afresh that a white woman's burden is starkly different from a white man's burden because the motto here is not to dictate terms but to enter into a meaningful dialogue, decode culture and unravel different layers of self-imposed and super-imposed censorship which all women suffer the world over primarily because of their good girl syndrome, a performance complex, a hidden urge to excel in all relationships, forgive as much as they can, bear it all with grace and dignity and resist washing dirty linen in public.

Full of anecdotes and riddles, strange stories, witty folklores most of our women poets are profusely sad and unbelievably vibrant at the same time. They sing unending songs, complete today's thought tomorrow and when they speak-strange voices arise from the depths of their bodies and the recesses of their lungs like water gurgling beneath the ground.

Though there is no room in their lives to go far – they spread their arms – one in the sun, the other in the mist and thus we learn from them the art to fill the emptiness of life between non-sensical, sensational events with innumerable little deeds of kindness, well meaning smiles and thoughtful gestures.

We have a unique composite culture, a unique moral geography of their own where gods and ghosts, animals and birds, the flora and the fauna, even the tiniest insets live together in strange amity-under the same rooms as if. Women talk even to trees and rivers, gods and ghosts. They worship them and curse them, fight with them and suffer with them all oppressions and calamities. Despite all caste and class divides, supernatural and human elements here emerge as one family, constantly operating under acute pressures of a lively love hate relationship.

This gives them a unique force of language which a feminist translator must exploit to the full because this would also mean exploring women's relation to oneself, to her psychic and bodily rhythms and the hitherto ignored grey areas of women's fantasy. All forceful women give birth to words flowing in accord with the contractual rhythm of labour. Translating the original feels like translating the Original Sin and one can't help being ticklish and devilish like Mother Eve who sits straight in all creative people, eating her forbidden apple tastefully. Call us what you will but we can't deny Eve the credit of being the first entrepreneur of the world. We are the translators of Eve's kind of digressive, tortuous but meaningful ventures. A little playful and creative at times, we are

also conscious of the fact that the free play shouldn't result in some kind of a Bakhtian '*free play*'. We are also aware of the fact that a translator's job is the tough job of dancing in chains, and the chains are those of the tender feminist bonding, not the shackles that Marx refers to in his famous ode to the workers: '*Workers of the world unite, you've nothing to lose but your chains*'. This bonding of the souls, this sakheewad, universal sisterhood is sensitive to the tortures and pains and conflicts common to all women on earth, so whenever one picks up a feminist text for translation, this urge of playing an interpreter, a '*bhashyakar*', an explainer and a justifier plays a big part in the mind.

There is a beautiful Hindi rendering of the saying "*Only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches*". "*Ja ke pair na phati biwai, so ka jane peer parai,*" and parallel to this runs the famous bhajan, Gandhijee's hot favourite "*Vaishnav jan to tene kahiye je peer parayee jane re.*" Now how we resolve this paradox is one challenge feminist translators face. The question is one of decoding culture and playing out the softer nuances. Women's poetry is most delicately handled by women translators also because '*khag hi jane khag ki bhasha*' ('a '*bird*' comprehends a '*bird*' better, she alone can play her best emissary'). If there are no interlinear versions possible, playing out silences, shruties, meers, and moorchanas can be handled only through difficult strokes. I have noticed that at times lexical shock renews the third language bones.

Multilingualism, bi-lingualism or even the choice of writing in two different genres is just like opening two or more windows together for proper cross-ventilation. But then that's not all. Like the naughty little girl in Saki's '*The Open Window*' our imagination plays new tricks upon all who wish to preen, intrude, inspect and issue commands.

On the whole, helping the sister writer translate her texts, the translator-artists from a different cultural region play the charismatic

role of Cuban showman who helped a woman through a difficult breech birth. The showman told her a myth whose progress, a struggle between spirits and animals within her, mimes the journey of the child down the birth canal, turning it round so that its head is in the right direction. It worked the baby was safely born and the mythic alligators, tentacled octopus and black tigers were cast away the placenta.

Translation is a second birth, and we all need a narrative that makes sense of the unspeakable physical or psychic disturbance, reconciling the conscious and the subconscious, if we are to move on. Magical is the effect of the power exerted by the symbolic structuring of experience through the narrative of translation. This narration reorders the subjective experience but it must do so by mapping that subjectivity through intelligent language games.

## Notes

1. Castells (1990), 28 “For those who feel they are marginal to the codes of western culture, translation stands as a metaphor for their ambiguous experience in the dominant culture... the sense of not being at home within the idioms of power..led many migrants like Sulman Rushdie to call themselves ‘translated beings.’”
2. Dhoomil, Sansad se sadak tak.

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