

Chapter II

Review of Literature on the English Translations of *Godaan* and *Nirmala*

Translation from Hindi to English is not, as is hinted in the previous chapter, an old phenomenon because Hindi comes into light as a major language only after Indian Independence in 1947. In addition, it took a while for India to break the inferior position of a colonized country to assert itself in the colonial world. Power contributes to the development of a language. Once the English world realized India's importance in the global village, translation from Hindi, India's official language with English, into English started. Herein, the translations of *Godaan* under discussion are one of the earliest and best adventures in the field, whereas translations of *Nirmala* represent recent practices in Hindi to English translation. It is not until towards the end of 20th century that *Nirmala*'s translations make their presence known.

This chapter is solely devoted to the critical study of the available literature on the select four English translations of *Godaan* and *Nirmala* in order to know what other scholars think of these translations. The chapter also includes any commentary or statement about the translation practices of any of the four (+1) translators of these translations, which may directly relate to the translations or not. Prefaces and introductions provided by these translators as part of their translations have also been discussed here.

English Translations of *Godaan* and their Translators

Godaan, which was first published in 1936, is the best and last completed novel of Premchand, "the first major Hindi Novelist" (Bender 162). It enjoys a "canonical status in modern India" (Jha 931). Critics like Mahendra V. Desai also consider it "the finest of the century" (Desai 268). Prabhakar Jha points out three branches of the critics of *Godaan*: In the first branch, critics focus on Hori and his tragic end; in the second, they focus on the gap between rural and the urban settings; and in the third one, their main concern is to find its

political overtones. He also says that there has been “more critical discussion about this novel than any other single text in Hindi, be it poetic, dramatic, or novelistic” (ibid). About the language of the novel, he states that it is a novel, “expressing a Galilean perception of language, one that denies the absolutism of a single and unitary language, that is, that refuses to acknowledge its own language as the sole verbal and semantic centre of the ideological world (Bakhtin 366)” (Jha 933). Therefore, he suggests that the main concern in the reading of *Godaan* should be “the study of specific images of languages and the organization of these images into their dialogic interrelationships” (ibid).

Prabhakar Jha in this suggestion is not absolutely correct because it contradicts the very aim with which Premchand wrote his novels. In his presidential address to the first conference of the Progressive Writers’ Association, India in 1936, Premchand said that literature is “the criticism of life” and the language used in it “is a means, not an end” (Premchand, “Aim of Literature” n. pag.). In the speech, he also says that “the same event or situation does not leave the same impression on everyone. Every person has a different mentality and point of view” (ibid). Here it seems that he himself is explaining why there should be more than one translator of his any single work.

There have been six English translations of *Godaan*. First translation of *Godaan* was done by Jai Ratan Singh and Purushottama Lal in 1957 while the second translation was accomplished by Gordon Charles Roadarmel in 1968 when it was commissioned by UNESCO. Between these two translations appeared an incomplete but scholarly translation by S. H. Vatsyayan ‘Ajneya’, himself a Hindi novelist. This unpublished version, informs Peter France, retains “only the strand of the plot set in a village while leaving out altogether the subplot set in a city—which constitutes nearly half of the novel” (461). Peter France also informs that this incomplete version was later used by Roadarmel in his translation of *Godaan* (ibid). Roadarmel, too, acknowledges this source in his introduction to *The Gift of a*

Cow (“Introduction” xxv). In fact, Roadarmel “worked closely” with S. H. Vatsyayan ‘Ajneya’ in his translation of *Godaan* (Dalmia xvi).

The fourth translation, an abridged one, of *Godaan* came out in 1996, produced by Dinesh Kumar and A.L. Madan. But this translation has not survived the test of time and is the least read by modern readers. It is also out of print. Despite its scholarly efforts, there is something in it which causes much loss of meaning in the translation, and also initiates readers’ disinterest.

The fact that Ajneya could not complete his translation and Dinesh Kumar and A.L. Madan’s translation is not popular anymore seems to point out that being a scholar does not always mean that one is a good translator; translation is an art and a translator needs specific qualities to be a good translator. The failure of these translators may also point out that every good translator cannot be a good translator of Premchand, which has also been pointed out by Inge C. Orr. Writing in 1977 about Premchand’s technique of writing, she says that the reason that few of Premchand’s works have been “translated into other languages” is that they, when translated, “appear naïve, over-idealized, in short, unconvincing” (34). One reason which she gives for failures is that it is not easy to translate Premchand’s “reformist ideology” which not only inspires subordinate actions of Premchand’s characters but also his plot and story (ibid).

Unlike the above mentioned four translations, the last two translations of *Godaan* by Mohd. Mazhar (2005) and Anurag Yadav (2009) are market oriented. They seem to have been written to make a profit from the English readers and from the students in the universities where these students read *Godaan*’s translation into English as part of their English curriculum. In these two translations, much of the literary quality and meaning of the SL text is at risk, leaving little hope for gaining any meaning from them.

Out of these six English translations of *Godaan*, only the first and the second (complete) translations of *Godaan* by Jai Ratan & P. Lal and Gordon C. Roadarmel are still popular among readers. In fact, they have been the most successful. Decades have passed since they were first published and they are still in print. In this period between initial publication and now, some critics also talk about these translations but the numbers of commentaries are not equal for both. In general, both translations suffer from the lack of sufficient critical evaluation. A brief survey of the available commentary on these two translations is as follows:

Translation of *Godaan* by Jai Ratan and P. Lal

Jai Ratan and P. Lal's translation of *Godaan* is one of these two translations which has suffered the most from the casual approach of the critics towards TS in its early times. As a result, there is not a single article or review available on it and whatever is available is in the form of references as to compare it with Roadarmel's translation. In such a situation, only things to discuss here in this section remain Jai Ratan and P. Lal's own views about the translation. But one can be disappointed that Jai Ratan and P. Lal do not provide any preface or introduction to the translation even though they might be aware that their translation comes out in the early phase of Hindi English translation. Meenakshi Mukherjee in an article about P. Lal's translations writes that P. Lal "began long before the translation boom happened in mainstream publishing" (n. pag.).

For not providing an introduction or preface with the translation, Jai Ratan is more responsible than P. Lal because his name appears first on the title page of the translation, therein indicating that he is the primary translator. He has not tried to compensate for the lack of an introduction to the translation by any other publication either.

It is not the case that Jai Ratan is not a good translator; in fact he is a prolific translator. Amrita Talwar states that for him, "translating literary works from languages such

as Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu is a passion,” and that he has translated more than 600 short stories and two Hindi novels into English (n. pag.). She also quotes Jai Ratan saying that “translation is an art” and also “rendering one culture into another” (ibid). “It is like mixing two cultures” (ibid). Through these statements, it appears that for Jai Ratan, transferring cultural elements is very important in a translation. That is why perhaps, in general, he uses foreignizing techniques in his translation and retains some cultural words from the source language but he also “provides [their] meanings... in the footnotes” (ibid). He believes that “translation is more difficult and laborious than original creative writing” (ibid).

In this chat with Amrita Talwar, Jai Ratan also refers to the translation of *Godaan*. He informs Amrita Talwar that

“P. Lal, the editor of Writers’ Workshop, suggested that I translate Premchand’s “Godaan” into English. The book had an interesting plot so the idea appealed to me. I translated the first two chapters and sent them to Jaico Publishers. They liked it and agreed to publish it. After that I never looked back”. (ibid)

But this information is quite confusing (or bewildering) as it appears that he is the only translator of *Godaan*. It may be a mistake. But if this is true, the question arises why do the publishers list P. Lal as a co-translator of the book and why did Jai Ratan agree to it? Perhaps P. Lal helped Jai Ratan in reviewing and preparing final drafts of the translation.

P. Lal’s position as a scholar of Translation Studies in India is that of a legendary figure because he not only translates Premchand’s Hindi works into English but also some Sanskrit texts. He is also remembered for his concept-cum-coinage “transcreation” which he uses as a substitute for the word “translation.” Keki N. Daruwalla, a renowned Indian English poet, defines this concept as “taking ‘justifiable liberties with the text, liberties suited to the target language” (Deshpande et. al 1).

Yet, in spite of his recognized authority in the field of translation, he does not think it necessary to provide an introduction or preface to the translation of *Godaan* either. Nor does

he specifically write about it anywhere else, although he does write about his translation techniques in the translation of the Hindi works of Premchand in one source. This is in the section “The Style of Premchand” in the introduction to *Twenty Four Stories by Premchand*. Later, P. Lal publishes this section as a complete chapter in his book, *Transcreation: Seven Essays*, with the title “On Transcreating Premchand”.

Thematically the essay, “On Transcreating Premchand,” has two parts: in one, P. Lal talks about his position as a translator of Premchand; in the other, he discusses *Twenty-Four Stories by Premchand*, a book which he translates with Nandini Nopany. In the second part, he refers to Roadarmel’s translation of *Godaan* too.

In considering his position of a translator of Premchand, P. Lal implies that he follows some principles of translation but they may not necessarily match those of other translators. In fact, he believes that every translator has some “principles by which he tries to abide and there can be no such thing as an ideal translation” (“On Transcreating” 69). Towards the end of the chapter, he suggests that “in the hazardous field of translation, especially of major creative literature, it is always instructive to examine the manner in which different translators go about their work, since no single translation can ever be acclaimed as having the definitive last word” (ibid 74). For one who has read his statement in the preface to *Transcreation: Seven Essays* that “that, all other things being equal, an Indian is better equipped than a “non-Indian” to translate from the Indian languages into English” (Lal, “Preface” 5), this perspective comes as a surprise.

But he fails to follow the same perspective for long. Soon he talks about Roadarmel’s translation of *Godaan* and indirectly criticizes him for translating the novel primarily for “non-Indian English reader, as do most of the other foreigners whose translations have appeared in the West” (Lal, “On Transcreating” 70). Technically, based on the above cited perspective, he should respect Roadarmel’s choice for the western readers; instead he

advocates superiority of his own translation of *Godaan*. Perhaps he would have avoided it if Roadarmel in the introduction to his translation of *Godaan* had not suggested to his readers that they may compare his translation with that of Jai Ratan and P. Lal. It appears to be a kind of intellectual argument between two scholars.

This is perhaps the reason that right after the above statement about Roadarmel's translation of *Godaan*, P. Lal discusses his (with Nandini Nopany) translation of twenty-four stories of Premchand and says in a rising tone that the translation aims at “*Indian* reader who has working knowledge of English” (ibid 71). In the discussion, he also says that the translation is “religiously scrupulous” with no “perversions”, “no paraphrase; no omissions of words or of phrases; no attempt to skip, evade, or bypass by giving approximate versions of difficult and obscure idiomatic lines or words and sentences in dialect’ no effort at improvement (which was often a temptation); only very occasional compression of two or more Hindi sentences into a single English sentence, or expansion; and absolutely no adaptation (except in *A Tale of Two Oxens*, the only story in this collection translated by P. Lal)” (ibid 71-72).

Kathryn Hansen does not agree with P. Lal about his above appreciation of his own translation (Hansen 175). Instead she points out that the translation of these stories in *Twenty-Four Stories by Premchand* often digresses from “literalness into a morass of misconstructured idioms, improper usage, and grandiose images that are simply not in the original text” (ibid). Furthermore, she accuses the translators of using “catchy” phrases, “idioms gone awry” and “bad grammar” (ibid). She also feels uncomfortable with their fondness for “coining verbs” (ibid) and says that “unfortunately, at least fifteen of them have already been published into other translations, and a comparison of these with earlier efforts does not do much credit to the current translators” (Hansen 174). Later in her review, she specifically compares the opening line (s) of the translation of Premchand's one story, “Shatranj Ke Khiladi,” as “The

Chess Players” by Nopany & P. Lal with that by P.C. Gupta and says that in the lines, “Nopany and Lal invent an image that is melodramatic and clichéd,” implying that P.C. Gupta’s translation is better (ibid 175). Since she provides specific evidences for her accusations, her judgment cannot be ignored completely.

Translation of *Godaan* by Gordon C. Roadarmel

When compared to Jai Ratan and P. Lal’s translation of *Godaan*, Roadarmel’s translation of *Godaan* has received wider acclaim in the English speaking world. Most of the critics also consider it a better translation. Ernest Bender’s statement in his review of Roadarmel’s translation of *Godaan* that Roadarmel’s translation of *Godaan* is “superior to the Jaico press edition of 1957” (162) is one such example.

Like Jai Ratan and P. Lal’s translation of *Godaan*, Roadarmel’s translation of *Godaan* does not suffer from the lack of any commentary on it. There is some commentary available but certainly not enough, especially when compared with the efforts made by the translator in the translation. A brief discussion of this commentary follows:

Ludo Rocher’s review of the translation in the 1969 issue of *The Journal of Asian Studies* is one of the earliest commentaries available. It is perhaps the most intensive and reliable too. He creates reliability by informing the readers that he is also a translator of Premchand and has translated some of his stories into Dutch and therefore is aware of the difficulties involved. He also informs the readers that his judgment is based on the comparative study of Roadarmel’s translation with the original Hindi text.

Ludo Rocher comments that the Roadarmel translation that it is “an excellent translation” making a “very pleasant reading” (196). He observes that since “good translations of Hindi literature and of the literatures of other modern Indian languages are rare,” this translation “may be recommended as a model to be followed” (197). He also appreciates Roadarmel for providing a glossary of Hindi words with the translation.

This reviewer also points out some of the places where this translation fails in conveying the exact meaning. Among these, he tells that *Varna* has to be broader than *jatí* on page 82 and that he will prefer “this murderer” for “this fiend” on page 134 (Rocher 196). He is also correct in suggesting “Omkarnath” for “Onkarnath” as “Omkarnath” gives the religious connotation of the sacred syllable “Om” (ibid). There are four other places where, he thinks, the translation “deviates slightly” from the SL text. For the translation, “In some things she could have been a teacher; in others she was more ingenious than most students,” on page 50, he suggests “In some things she was more skillful than a graduate girl; in others she was more ignorant than a baby”¹ (197). For “I” in “I suppose nothing was spent for all that!” on page 210, he suggests that it should be replaced by “You” as the original line reads “Kya ismem kuch kharc hi nahim hua?” Furthermore, he recommends that the word “girl” should be added after “brahmin” in “A brahmin [girl] would just play the bride” on page 303 of the translation because Hindi pronoun “Vah” in the previous sentence refers to a Brahmin girl (197). Finally in the fourth place, he recommends to replace “three people” in the following sentence by “three men,” and Mehta in ““No, Govindi,’ Mehta interrupted” on page 359 by “Khanna” as this is misunderstanding on the part of the translator. As a result of this last correction, he informs, “Mehta” in “Without opposing Mehta” will also be changed by “him, i.e. Khanna” in the following line.

In 1970, *The Journal of Asian Studies* published another review of the Roadarmel translation. In this review, Robert O. Swan writes that many translations of Hindi text, *Godaan*, were tried in the past and most of them failed, but this translation is of “highest order” because the language of the translation is “as clear and as stylistically suitable as can be expected of English” in the Indian setting (218). In addition, he defends the title *The Gift*

¹ Here, the analogy between ignorance and baby is not correct for a baby is not always ignorant.

of a Cow for *Godaan*. He says that it has a “better chance of being understood in New York,” though it cannot carry the “connotation freight” of the original title *Godaan* (219).

But soon after this critical move, Swan’s position becomes kind of blurry as he, instead of talking about the translation, starts talking about Premchand and the SL text. He says that “*Godaan* fails to be completely successful novel by its failure to interweave its idealism with its action” and that in the novel, Premchand fails to make “two worlds”—rural and urban—relevant to each other (219). Furthermore he also makes statements like “even when Premchand decides to build one of these elite persons into a worthy, sympathetic character, the result is hardly more than ink on paper” (220). Strangely, he concludes his review talking about the SL text and not about the translation of which review he is writing².

Contrary to these two reviews in *The Journal of Asian Studies*, one review of Roadarmel’s translation appears in July/ August 1969 issue of *Choice* in which the anonymous reviewer is a bit different in his approach because he not only talks about the strengths and weaknesses of Roadarmel’s translation (and *Godaan*) but also compares it with the Jai Ratan and P. Lal translation.

This anonymous reviewer begins the review by telling, though in a kind of emotional tone, that *Godaan* is a “‘classic’ of modern Indian fiction” and, therefore, “an important novel to make available to American readers,” but soon he balances this kind of utopian position by a warning that this novel should not be mistaken as representing all of India (“Review: The Gift of a Cow” 655). About Premchand’s *Godaan*, he states that “although Premchand’s presentation of village life is accurate and convincing, his middle class Indians seem sometimes bookish and trite” (ibid). At this point, this reviewer becomes a little unreliable since he is quoting “Classic” for the SL text, and using pricking words like “bookish” and “trite” at the same time. In the same tone of appreciation and still pointing out

² Perhaps Robert O. Swan had written a separate paper on Premchand and his *Godaan*.

problems (somewhat a denunciation), he says about the Roadarmel translation that it is “careful though a little pedantic” and that it “might have been improved by judicious cutting” (ibid). He explains this statement further by comparing it with Jai Ratan and P. Lal’s translation. He says that the translation by Jai Ratan and P. Lal, “which uses only about three-fifths as many words as this one [translation by Roadarmel], often seems to read better” (“Review: The Gift of a Cow” 655-56). He also says that though “the American translator [Gordon C. Roadarmel] is better with idioms and colloquial speech,” there are “occasional lapse” in it: “His face fell” in Jai Ratan and P. Lal translation becomes “the rather clumsy and unidiomatic ‘his face dropped’ in Roadarmel’s (“Review: The Gift of a Cow” 656). However, finally the reviewer concludes that the book deserves a place in college libraries³.

Similar is the opinion of Michael Sprinker in the footnotes of his article, “Marxism and Nationalism: Ideology and Class Struggle in Premchand’s *Godan*,” about Roadarmel’s and Jai Ratan & P. Lal’s translations of *Godaan*. In the footnotes, Michael Sprinker says that he uses citation in the text from Roadarmel’s translation but he has also consulted another translation of the same text by Jai Ratan and P. Lal which “is generally thought to be inferior” (76). But at one point at page 68, he points out that here (page no. 414 in Roadarmel’s translation) “the Ratan-Lal translation is more emphatic: ‘In disgust, he turned a tiller of the soil’” (79).

In addition to the three above cited reviews and one occasional reference on Roadarmel’s translation, there are three other reviews by Taya Zinkin, Donald Clay Johnson and an anonymous reviewer too but these are not as detailed. In these, the authors either review the two works of translation at the same time (and Roadarmel’s translation is one of these two works) or these reviews are very short, informative and, at times, casual.

³ Unfortunately by this time, he has confused the readers enough to wonder whether to believe his judgment or not.

Taya Zinkin in a one page (three paragraphs) long review discusses two works of translation: *The Gift of a Cow* by Gordon C. Roadarmel and *Pather Panchali* by Bibhutibhusan Banerji. In the review, she devotes one paragraph to *The Gift of a Cow* where she mostly appreciates it for its subject matter. Her final conclusion about the translation is that Roadarmel has translated the novel “into English with great skill” (190).

Donald Clay Johnson’s twenty lines review, on the other hand, discourages any hope of a critical analysis and is just informative. He begins by telling that Premchand is “the best novelist in Hindi of the 20th century” and that this translation by Roadarmel is a UNESCO sponsored project (1163). He appreciates some of the features of the SL text, not of the translation, and finally concludes that “this is an absolute first purchase for any collection of world literature or for any India collection” (ibid).

The approach of the unnamed reviewer in *The Booklist and Subscription Books Bulletin* is also similar wherein he says nothing about the translation except that this translation is “one of the first from the Hindi into English in the UNESCO translations series” (“Review: *The Gift of a Cow*” 1061-62). Most of the time, he just appreciates SL text and in this one paragraph long review, he even commits one grammatical mistake: he uses definite article “the” before the name of the source language i.e. Hindi.

As opposed to the above commentaries on the translation, better commentary appears with the translation itself in the form of the introduction. In the introduction, Roadarmel explains why he takes on the task of translating Premchand’s *Godaan*, what translation techniques he employs while translating, and what liberties he takes and why. From these explanations, his discussion of the liberties taken is quite extensive, also indicating his concerns for the loss and gain of meaning in his translation. Two of the liberties, which he takes and accepts, are: 1. He does not use any explanatory notes or footnotes in the translation although he understands that “some readers may miss or misinterpret certain allusions”

(“Introduction” xxii). He believes that this risk is worth taking than “intruding of the author’s work and disturbing the pleasure of other readers” (ibid). 2. He improves on the “chronological and other inconsistencies” of the SL text (“Introduction” xxiii).

But these liberties should not be understood to mean that he is not faithful in the translation. He remains faithful because he “follows the wording of the original” closely and lets the author “speak for himself as much as possible” so that “the readers can judge both the strengths and weaknesses of the author’s work” (“Introduction” xxiii- xxiv).

In the section entitled “The Translation” of the introduction, he explains his liberties in more detail. Discussing these liberties, he accepts that he has made some deliberate changes in translation, those in style being primary, because there is difference between Hindi and English. In these stylistic changes, he, though sometimes, changes passive constructions into active constructions, rhetorical questions into direct statements, some short sentences into one combined sentence, and direct thought and conversation into indirect thought and conversation (“Introduction” xxiv). But he only makes these alterations if the alternatives sound unnatural to the English reader when they appeared natural to the SL reader. He uses the same theory for the translation of idioms and images (ibid). Furthermore, he informs the readers that he deliberately uses few Hindi words in translation if possible, italicizes them when they first show up, and provides their meaning in the glossary (ibid). Similarly, although he retains “the Indian coinage system,” he replaces the *pie* by *pice* or *cowrie* to avoid any confusion for some readers. He mostly retains “the terms of relationship which so commonly replace personal names in Hindi conversation” if they seem natural to the TL readers, and gives the “approximate English equivalents” to the “Indian weights and measures” (“Introduction” xxv). For the latter, he uses quarts for *seers*, acres for *bighas*, bushels or pounds for *maunds*, etc. Finally, he also informs that “consistency in transliterating the Hindi terms has been sacrificed at times for more conventional spellings” (ibid).

Apart from the above introduction, there is one other place where Roadarmel talks, albeit briefly, about some of his translation techniques in the translation from Hindi to English. This is in the introduction to *A Death in Delhi: Modern Hindi Short Stories*. Among his comments, he states clearly that he writes his translations for American readers. He says that in the stories, he has generally “tried to render equivalents for the Hindi originals as faithfully as seemed possible within the limits of modern idiomatic English and within the conceptual framework of the English reader” but the language of the translation is “closer to American English than to British English or to Indian English” (7). However, he assures the reader that he tries to avoid “heavy Americanism” (ibid).

Vasudha Dalmia’s introduction to the New Edition of Roadarmel’s translation can also be discussed here. About *Godaan*, Dalmia points out two things in the introduction: 1. *Godaan* is a “vibrant” novel which “poses a challenge to the best of translators” (xiv) and 2. It is very “rich” in “speech types” which, and the tension between these, pose “more than the usual difficulties in translation” (xv). Departing from these two points, she comments about Roadarmel’s translation that it is because of these two points and his concern for the Western readership that sometimes he leaves some words and sentences untranslated. She specifies two such places. These places are: 1. when Dhaniya talks about “Swaraj” (Self or home-rule) with a corps and 2. when Gobar calls his father “gau” (cow). But in her final assessment, she concludes that Roadarmel’s translation is “fluent, readable and lively” (ibid).

English Translations of *Nirmala* and their Translators

After *Godaan*, *Nirmala* is another novel of Premchand widely known today. It is “a prime example of Premchand’s combination of social realism and drama” (Orsini xxii). It was published in *Chand*, a Hindi magazine, in twelve monthly installments, from November 1925 to November 1926 except that there was no installment in January 1926. In the book form, it was first published in January 1927 and had a subtitle which described it as a

“revolutionary social novel” (Rai, “Foreword” ix-x). Acknowledging the popularity of serialized *Nirmala* and the consequent rise in the sale of *Chand*, Alok Rai comments in the foreword that “actual circulation figures are hard to come by, but there is oral testimony that the monthly installments of *Nirmala* generated a great deal of excitement and anticipation. They were eagerly awaited, eagerly discussed” (ibid x).

Nirmala is also the novel which, like *Godaan*, has been translated by more than one scholarly translator. First, David Rubin translates it as *The Second Wife* in 1988 and then Alok Rai as *Nirmala* in 1999. An analysis of the available literature on these two translations of *Nirmala* follows.

Translation of *Nirmala* by David Rubin

David Rubin is one of the best translators of Premchand. His career as a translator of Premchand begins with the translations of Premchand’s short stories. He translates these stories in three volumes—*The World of Premchand*⁴ (1969), *Deliverance and Other Stories* (1988) and *Widows, Wives and Other Heroines: Twelve Stories*⁵ (1998). All the three volumes have been very well received critically. In fact, it is only after his success in the translations of these short stories that he ventures to translate Premchand’s *Nirmala*.

But, instead of David Rubin being one of the best translators of Premchand, the sad story of the discrimination of the critics towards translations is also repeated here. As a result, there is only one review (by Anjana Ranajan) which is available on the translation, excluding one M. Phil. dissertation completed in India. But one good thing about David Rubin is that he himself provides a well explained and informative introduction with the translation. His introductions to the translations of Premchand’s short stories are also very good. Since the

⁴ In the introduction to *A Death in Delhi: Modern Hindi Short Stories*, Gordon C. Roadarmel calls it “the best collection in English” of Premchand’s short stories (3).

⁵ In a review of this collection, Carla Petievich remarks that “It is always a pleasure to read David Rubin’s translation” because he “[re]confirms his position as Premchand’s foremost translator in North America, if not of the entire Anglophone world” (555).

translations of the short stories are from Premchand, other critics' one or two commentaries on them also provide some critical framework for the translation.

David Rubin's introduction to his translation of *Nirmala* is important because of his two theoretical stands. In one stand, he explains, though implicitly, why he decides to translate *Nirmala* and not any other Hindi work of Premchand; in the other, he tells at a great length about the liberties (and techniques) which he enjoys (employs) in the translation.

About the question, why he decides to translate *Nirmala* and not any other Hindi work of Premchand, Rubin states three reasons. These are:

1. *Nirmala* is "a tale of woman's tragedy," "which nevertheless rises above the usual limitations of a *roman a these* in its dramatization of very specific and highly individualized private lives" ("Translator's Introduction" 6).
2. It "makes its appeal on a basis of universal human experience that transcends any local peculiarities of customs and culture" (ibid 10). and
3. "The book is tighter in construction and less digressive" and the characters are "less idealistic" (ibid 6).

However, these praiseworthy statements should not be mistaken for a belief that he is blind towards the problems and difficulties in the SL text. In the introduction, he also states them. Among the problems, he declares that there are "occasional inconsistencies" in the SL text and Premchand is "careless about questions of time and money" ("Translator's Introduction" 7)⁶. Still, he tries to be "as faithful, as literal, as possible" (ibid). In order to remain faithful, he informs that he keeps chapters and paragraphs of the same length as they are in the original and retains SL names of the Indian sweets in the translation as it is. But since the SL text is difficult and has problems too, he has to take some "unfortunate" liberties in the translation. A brief account of these liberties is as follows:

⁶ Gulzar, a Hindi writer himself, explains these inconsistencies in *Nirmala* more openly. He feels that "the novel is a little outstretched and tends to repeat many an emotion" and it has "diversions and contradictions too" (124).

1. He recasts the dialogues which are typographically in the manner of a play in the SL text into the manner of ordinary English dialogues in the translation. He also changes the first person of the “interior monologue” in the SL text into a “conventional way of English fiction, that is, in the third person, changing present and future tenses to the appropriate past and conditional” in the translation (Rubin, “Translator’s Introduction” 8).
2. Since “the speech of Premchand’s characters drawn from old-fashioned middle-class society in Lucknow, Allahabad and Varanasi, is highly elliptical, metaphorical and allusive,” literal translation is not always possible (ibid). In such places, he replaces the literal translation by equivalents which “unhappily must sacrifice the salty character of the original” (ibid).
3. Usually he keeps the honorific or commonly used relational words in the translation and provides a footnote for clarification if needed; at times he changes these for the name of the characters for more clarity (ibid 9).
4. He emphasizes one aspect of Indian culture in the translation by stating that Indians are intensely concerned with self-respect, public image or “face” by translating sentences like “kisi ne kuch kaha tha” as “someone must have said something nasty or disgracing” (ibid). In the translation of this line, the words “nasty” and “disgracing” characterize this aspect.
5. Finally, “in translating Indian names he opted [opts] to dispense with diacritical marks and to use instead phonetic or conventional English spellings” (ibid 10).

However, there is one thing about which David Rubin does not talk about in the introduction. This is the title: why has he replaced the original title of the novel, *Nirmala*, which is the name of the female protagonist, by *The Second Wife*? Since the question remains unanswered, his similar translation practice in the translation of Premchand’s short-stories

can be examined wherein he talks about his pattern of translating a Hindi title. About the choice of the title, *Widows, Wives and Other Heroines*, for the third volume of the translations of Premchand's select stories, Rubin tells in the volume's introduction that he bases the title on the main theme of the stories. But about the titles of individual stories, he chooses a different approach. For these, he gives "generally direct translations of the original" and "when this is not the case, there is a note to that effect" (Rubin, "Introduction" 15).

There are other liberties which are just implied in the introduction to *The Second Wife* but are stated explicitly in the Introduction to *Widows, Wives and Other Heroines*. About Premchand's style, he states that "as has often been the case with writers of voluminous fiction for publication in newspapers and journals, there are occasional errors or confusions in Premchand's narrative" ("Introduction" 13). He corrects these errors in translation. He also writes that Premchand uses "rhetorical exaggeration" to convey his social idealism, and therefore, it should not be treated something melodramatic," something very true about *Nirmala* too (ibid).

About his style in the translation of these stories, he states that he tries to be faithfully literal, though frequently he combines short Hindi sentences or paragraphs into one sentence or paragraph with the help of subordinate conjunction (ibid). He applies the same approach in the translation of idioms (and proverbs), though he translates the direct discourse of Hindi into "the standard manner of indirect discourse" of English (Rubin, "Introduction" 14). He takes similar liberty in translating "the speaker's name followed by dash" in the Hindi dialogues and the colloquial Hindustani of rural (and urban) characters into that of English (ibid). However, he retains Hindi, Urdu or Sanskrit words which can easily be found in most standard English dictionaries (ibid 15). He also provides footnotes and explanations when necessary.

Anjana Ranjan expresses a similar view about Rubin's translation of *Nirmala*. About the translation, she says that David Rubin translates "the tragedy of Premchand's classic as simply as the original" even though "some changes are inescapable, as the language of Premchand's characters 'is highly elliptical, metaphorical and allusive'—qualities that would be rendered meaningless in literal translation" (n. pag.). By this statement, she implies (and approves of) that Rubin's translation is a literal translation. To support this argument, she gives two examples from the translation in which she appreciates Rubin for maintaining "the colour of ordinary Hindi" (ibid). In one example, in an exchange between Pandit Moteram and Bhalachandra, David Rubin uses "A man like him is one in a hundred thousand—two hundred thousand!" which would also have been expressed if he had just said "one in a million" as the English say. Referring to this example, Anjana Ranjan informs that here "Indian concept of 1, 00,000 (a lakh) is highlighted" (ibid).

Another example which she quotes is a speech by Nirmala's maid, Bhungi to her. She says that here David Rubin translates "main jhoot kyun bolun" in Bhungi's speech as "why should I lie?" which can be mistaken at first to suggest that Nirmala is asking her to tell a lie when, in fact, she is trying to convince Nirmala of her sincerity (ibid). David Rubin risks this for the literalness and his promise to keep Indian color. From this example, Anjana Ranjan concludes that "such use of language gives readers a glimpse into the society in which the story is set, sometimes more effectively than anecdotes" (ibid).

Ranjan also talks about the title of the translation but she neither appreciates the translated title, *The Second Wife*, for *Nirmala* nor does she deprecate it. She maintains a safe position in this matter as on the one hand, she says about the title that "it has a different feel when read with a Western sensibility;" on the other, she comments that it would be unacceptable in traditional Indian society where calling a girl a second wife would be equivalent to saying that "she was hurled into well" (ibid). Furthermore, similarly, on the one

hand, she says that the title phrase “hangs in the air like a warrant of doom”; on the other, she says that it “takes some understanding to catch those resonances” (ibid). Perhaps, she implies that the effort to give a different title is good but it would have been better if the same title were retained.

In 2002, A. Sailaja submitted an M. Phil. Dissertation in the Centre of Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, India on David Rubin’s translation of *Nirmala* under the title, “Problems of Translation of Hindi into English: with Special Reference to *NIRMALA* of Premchand”. Though the title indicates that the research is somewhat thorough and different, reading the dissertation does not fulfill the expectation. The researcher compares David Rubin’s translation with the original novel under three main headings: 1. Food Stuffs and Relations 2. Cultural Aspects and 3. Idioms, but she fails to make any significant research contribution. She conducts the comparative study on a facile level as well as fails in organizing her material. There are also many typing mistakes and her position about the translator is almost biased. Strangely, she, unlike a researcher of her position, reacts radically about the translation process of the translator. At one point in her second chapter, she says that “the translator did not think seriously about the rendering of terms denoting food stuffs” (9). She also uses harsh terminology like “ridiculous,” “certainly a bad translation” (8), “translator’s poor understanding,” “the great divide between the oriental and occidental cultures,” “the translator can/could not do well” (9) or harsh sentences like “the translator did not do the necessary homework before embarking upon the task or it happened due to inadvertence” (15), and “the translator had failed on both the cultural and semantic fronts” (22). Most of the time, she advocates for footnotes even though the translator has stated in the preface why he does not provide them as much as she wants.

Finally, two more available reviews by Ronny Noor and Bikram K. Das can be discussed here. Though these reviews are not about Rubin's translation of *Nirmala*, these are about his other translations.

Among these, Ronny Noor reviews *Widows, Wives and Other Heroines* but he says almost nothing about the language or quality of the translation or about the translator. Throughout he just discusses twelve stories of the book thematically into four groups. Though a bit different, he says in the beginning of the review that Premchand was not well-known in his time as "it is not easy to be noticed when a writer is contemporary of a great artist" (901). This contemporary of Premchand is Rabindra Nath Tagore who "dwarfed all writers of the Indian subcontinent"(ibid). This statement by Ronny Noor seems to reflect his personal liking of Tagore, and does not contribute much to the review.

As opposed to Ronny Noor's review, Bikram K. Das' review of *The World of Premchand* is more extensive. In the review, the reviewer praises David Rubin highly for his translation practice, and calls his *The World of Premchand* "one of the finest English renderings," especially because Premchand's style is "particularly difficult to recreate on account of its adherence to the colloquial idiom (a far cry from the ornate and Sanskritized Hindi of today)" (199). Furthermore, he says that "Rubin's translation preserves the earthy flavour of Premchand's prose; at times, it is almost literal, and if it should sound alien and ungrammatical to purists, even they will concede that it has a richness that a more 'correct' translation might have missed" (ibid). He does not entertain any complaint against the translation either.

The translation of *Nirmala* by Alok Rai

Compared to David Rubin's, Alok Rai's translation of *Nirmala* is a recent venture which appears eleven years later. It was probably done to convey a better and modern understanding of the SL text to the contemporary English readers. To accomplish this aim

perhaps, Alok Rai not only includes foreword and Translator's Note but also an afterword. Yet his translation has not received much attention from the critics. His position as a grandson of Premchand does not help his translation gain any added popularity and attention either.

There can be many reasons for the lesser popularity of this translation, but one possible reason can be that the translation is done in India by an Indian translator for the Indian English readers. Most of these Indians can either read the novel in the SL text or they have access to Rubin's translation. Whatever the reasons, Rai's translation of *Nirmala* suffers from the lack of critical commentary. Excluding Alok Rai's own foreword, afterword and Translator's Note, there are only four commentaries available on it, including those which come out from the critics who review *The Oxford India Premchand*, an anthology of the select translations of Premchand's works into English, where it is printed again. These four commentaries are an article by Pankaj Mishra and three reviews respectively by an anonymous reviewer, Harish Trivedi, and Daisy Rockwell.

Again, among these four commentaries, two commentaries by Daisy Rockwell and Pankaj Mishra do not say anything specific about the features, success or failure of the translation, and the anonymous reviewer's commentary is unreliable. In this case, only authentic commentary remains the review by Harish Trivedi.

Though the article by Pankaj Mishra appears in *The New York Review of Books* (a fact accountable for the article's quality), it does not give any substantial analysis of the translation. It does refer to it. It mainly discusses the translation from the thematic point of view, and this thematic analysis is, too, a part of a larger discussion which includes discussion of six other books.

Similar is the position of Daisy Rockwell in the review of *The Oxford India Premchand*. In the review, she does not say anything specific about Rai's translation of

Nirmala though she talks about his “Afterword: Hearing Nirmala’s Silence.” She calls it “the real gem of the volume” (232). At one point, she makes a general remark about the anthology that “the translations of the fiction, while unreadable, are uneven in their style and would benefit from some comprehensive editing” (ibid). Since Alok Rai’s translation is part of the anthology and the above statement is about all works of fiction in it, this also applies to his translated work.

The anonymous reviewer’s position in the *Virginia Quarterly Review* is worse than that of Pankaj Mishra or Daisy Rockwell. The reviewer writes the review in the most careless manner as even to misstate the year of publication of the SL text as 1925. He misinterprets the story too and accuses the female protagonist, Nirmala, of being the source of the tragedy. Furthermore, he says that *Nirmala* is a “bitter melodrama” depicting Nirmala, “a fatherless young Indian woman forced into marriage with an elderly widower by a hideously selfish and shallow mother” (“Review: *Nirmala*” 135). By the end of the novel, Nirmala turns, he continues, from “a sullen innocent into a monster of a wife and stepmother” and “pulls her family into the nightmare of her own frustrated life as if destruction might bestow a semblance of agency” (ibid). Anyone who has read serious criticism on *Nirmala* in Hindi will feel cheated by this review. In addition, any female reader will find the choice of the adjectives in the above quotations for the women characters—Nirmala and her mother—of the novel objectionable.

In contrast to the above mentioned three reviews, Harish Trivedi’s review of *The Oxford India Premchand* is the only review⁷ which provides some serious commentary, though not enough, on Alok Rai’s translation. About Alok Rai’s translation, Harish Trivedi says that Alok Rai “renders *Nirmala* with confident ease and flair and an occasional Indianism; he also provides a sophisticated discussion of the mode of melodrama which

⁷ He also discusses another book, *Courtesans’ Quarter* (a translation of Premchand’s another novel, *Sevaasadan* by Amina Zafar in Pakistan), in the review.

Premchand is said to resort to” (n. pag.). Trivedi intentionally quotes David Rubin’s statement that “it seems scarcely possible to do justice to Premchand’s style in translation” to contrast it to what he says above about Alok Rai’s success in the translation of *Nirmala*. Perhaps he implies that Alok Rai’s translation is better than that of David Rubin.

Finally, Alok Rai’s own views and opinions about his translation of *Nirmala* in the foreword, afterword and Translator’s Note can be discussed here. Certainly, these three sources are important documents for the analysis of the translation as they not only explain the translator’s position but also provide first hand information about his critical framework. A brief discussion of these three follows:

In the foreword, Alok Rai mainly appreciates Premchand for his contribution to the development of Hindi and Urdu and of the genre of fiction. He also values *Nirmala* highly. Most of the times, his appreciation is genuine though at times he becomes emotionally involved with the author, who also happens to be his grandfather. About Premchand, he tells the readers that Premchand is “unique” among his contemporaries because he writes both in Hindi and Urdu with equal mastery, and therefore “stands at the head of not one but *two* modern literary traditions” (“Foreword” viii). In a similar tone, he calls *Nirmala* “a classic text of the woman as victim, at least in Hindi” and chides those feminists who “find such texts quaint and sometimes even offensive” (ibid ix, x). He explains that “precisely such texts and their pioneering authors [...] have made their modern critics possible” (ibid x-xi). This is a good observation but in the next comment—“after all, we often disapprove of those on whose shoulders we stand”—, he becomes somewhat passionate towards the SL author (ibid xi).

Alok Rai uses a similar approach in the afterword too. Therein he mainly discusses *Nirmala* as one of Premchand’s best works. No doubt, his discussion of the features of melodrama and its application on *Nirmala* is a scholarly attempt to give a new perspective to

the text. But here, too, he becomes emotionally involved with Premchand and even defends the minor inconsistencies committed in the text saying that they are intentional and are part of the melodramatic techniques (204-05). In reality, these inconsistencies just happen to be, as is pointed out by David Rubin and Gulzar above, and are not intentional.

His position in his Translator's Note is not, compared to his critical positions in the foreword and afterword, as clear and concrete. However, he explains some important things about his translation and translation techniques. He states in general that all translators try to maintain "some balance between the poles of exoticism and domestication" and so does he (xii). But he has translated the novel for an Indian English reader. He confesses that it is because of this reader—the reader which "is notoriously prone to the suspicion that it is not he that is being addressed, but an international reader, somewhere behind his right shoulder"—that he has left "certain things" untranslated and un-transcribed (ibid). In other things, he expresses a hope that perhaps "a gifted teacher" will be able to engage students with his translated text and its culture, the culture which is "simultaneously understandable—i.e. not exotic—and also different—i.e. not domesticated, common or garden" ("Translator's Note" xiii). He also assures that his three pages long glossary (which he provides at the end of the translation) will help the students in this direction.

Thus, the above discussion of the criticism of the four translations shows that all of these translations are genuine translations showing the difficult and scholarly efforts of their translators. The discussion also points out that each of these translations also suffers from some kind of lacuna or problem. To state it another way, the discussion reflects that each translator has some special qualities which help him to complete the translation of the SL text in a most fruitful way. With the help of these qualities, the translator gains meaning in the translation. But he does not always reach it; there are times when he fails to transfer the

meaning accurately and most faithfully. This failure initiates a loss of meaning. There can be many reasons; language difference, cultural gap and translator's personal (mis)understanding are some of the main reasons which the critics of these translations point out.

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