Chapter IV

The Politics of Translation

Translation Studies now enjoys substantial critical attention as it is no more a secondary neutral activity, but one capable of providing ample scope for critical analysis at multiple levels. The earlier practice was to relegate the activity of translation to the periphery, labelling it as insignificant and trivial. Translation had to face the sad fate of being designated to the margins with the original text always occupying the centre of critical interest. Translation generally involves the rendering of a source language (SL) text into the target language (TL) so as to ensure that the surface meaning of the two will be preserved as closely as possible, but not so closely that the target language structures will be seriously distorted. Such a restricted concept of translation is the outcome of the low status accorded to the translator and to the distinctions usually made between the writer and the translator to the detriment of the latter. Hillaire Belloc summed up the problem of the status of a translation in his Taylorian lecture On Translation as long ago as 1931:

The art of translation is a subsidiary art and derivative. On this account it has never been granted the dignity of original work and has suffered too much in the general judgement of letters. (4)

Translation has been perceived as a mechanical rather than a creative process, making it a low status occupation. However, a clear insight into the process of
translation reveals that it is an intensely political activity with its own methods of constructing and perpetuating hegemonic equations.

Etymologically, translation means a "carrying across" or "bringing across." The Latin *translatio* is derived from the past participle, *translatus*, of *transferre* (*trans* means "across" and *ferre* means "to carry" or "to bring"). It has often been defined as an activity comprising of the interpretation of the meaning of a text, the source text, in one language and the production of the target text in another language. Translation is the general term that refers to the transfer of thoughts and ideas from one language (source) to another (target), whether the languages are in written or oral form; whether the languages have established orthographies or do not have such standardization; or whether one or both languages is based on signs, as with sign languages of the deaf. Translation is an attempted revitalization of the original in another verbal space and verbal period. Like a literary text which belongs to its original period and style and continues to exist through successive periods, translation also at once imitates and transcends the original.

Translation has always been considered a univocal discipline, rather dull and monotonous and without the complexities of underlying ideologies, hidden motives and prejudices. As the translator is not the origin of the work of art, he does not possess “genius” and he is considered merely a drudge, a proletariat, and a *shudra* in the literary *Varna* system. However, the field of translation studies has lately taken on many more meanings and now encompasses spheres beyond the usual textual dimension. Translation today is as much about the
translation of cultural, political and historical contexts and concepts as it is about language.

Translation encompasses political and cultural dimensions that concern not only the translations of languages but of cultural contexts between different countries, cultures and political systems. Translation illustrates how different languages, cultures or political contexts can be integrated to provide mutual intelligibility without sacrificing differences. At the same time it is also the story of hidden manipulations, mediations, appropriations and the play of hegemonically constructed structures. As long ago as 1935, Jawaharlal Nehru expressed his apprehensions about translation in an essay he wrote in Hindi, which he himself translated into English as "The Meaning of Words":

To translate from one language to another is a very difficult task.

. . Language is semi-frozen thought - imagination converted into statues . . . Difficulty can arise between two persons who speak the same language, are literate and civilized and brought up in the same culture... two persons who speak two different languages and do not know much about the cultures of each other. Their mental ideas differ as heaven and earth....

(qtd.in.Nair,2002: 7)

The task of the translator presumably is to unfreeze shapes that thought has assumed in one language and then to refreeze them in another. But the process of metamorphosis included is coloured by the overt or inert play of ideology
and hegemony. Translation is about the creation of new cultural and political maps, the establishment of shared territories and of points of articulation.

An understanding of the potentials of translation has led to the development of a specialized discipline called Translation studies. Translation Studies is the branch of humanities dealing with the systematic, interdisciplinary study of the theory, the practice and the application of translation and interpretation and evaluation of these activities and their consequences. Translation studies can be normative by prescribing rules for the application of these activities or descriptive by describing translation both as a process and a product. As an interdisciplinary form of study, Translation Studies borrows much from the different fields of study that support translation. These include Comparative Literature, Computer Science, History, Linguistics, Philosophy, Semiotics, so on and so forth. Translation is of different types namely Commercial translation, Computer translation, General translation, Legal translation, Literary translation, Medical translation, Pedagogical translation, Scientific translation, Scholarly translation, Technical translation and Translation for dubbing and film subtitles. A new term carrying the paraphernalia of connotations with it is the Cultural Translation.

Translation is a manifold and variegated activity. Joseph Casagrande distinguishes four types of translation in general (1969: 334-335). The first type is pragmatic translation referring to the translation of a message with an interest in the accuracy of the information that is meant to be conveyed in the source language form. Translation of technical documents is an example of this
type. This is sharply contrasted with the second type of translation called the aesthetic-poetic translation, in which the translator takes into account the affect, emotion and feelings of an original language version. The clearest examples are in the translation of literature. The third type is ethnographic translation and its purpose is to explicate the cultural context of the source and target language versions. It is concerned with the importance of social and cultural contexts in translation. The fourth type is linguistic translation and it is concerned with equivalent meanings of the constituent morphemes of the target language.

Translation definitely has a central core of linguistic activity, but it belongs most properly to semiotics, the science that studies the systems or structures of the processes and functions of signs. Beyond the notion stressed by the narrow linguistic approach that translation involves the transfer of meaning contained in one set of language signs into another set of language signs through the competent use of meaning and grammar, the process also involves a whole set of extra linguistic criteria.

In his article “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation,” Roman Jakobson distinguishes three types of translation: The first type is intralingual translation, or rewording: an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs in the same language. The second type is interlingual translation or translation proper: an interpretation of verbal signs by means of verbal signs in some other language. The last type is inter-semiotic translation or transmutation: an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of non-verbal sign systems (1962: 232-9). This type undergoes generic transmutation in the process of translation as in the case of film adaptation of literary texts.
The intention of the translator and the methods adopted often lead to another distinction between translations as free and literal translations. Free Translation is translating loosely from the original and is contrasted with word for word or literal translation: that is, transferring the meaning of each individual word in a text to the equivalent word in the target language. The extent to which such freedom is exercised determines the formation of an adaptation which is rather a new rendering of the original. Adaptations are versions where there is a clear cut tracing back to the essence of the source text but with differences and often they exist as individual entities.

Edward Sapir claims that language is a guide to social reality and that human beings are at the mercy of language that has become the medium of expression for their society. He asserts that experience is largely determined by the language habits of the community and that each separate structure represents a separate reality:

No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached. (1958:69)

Sapir’s thesis, later endorsed by his student Benjamin Lee Whorf and commonly known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, states that there is a systematic relationship between the grammatical categories of the language a person speaks and how that person both understands the world and behaves in
it. Language is seen as the heart within the body of culture and it is the interaction between the two that results in the continuation of life-energy.

At different stages different theorists have expounded different aspects of translation and they have all added significant contributions to the understanding of translation. The question of equivalence, the extent of correspondence between the source text and the target text, has been one that claimed critical consideration for long.

Anton Popovic, in his definition of translation equivalence, distinguishes four types: The first type is linguistic equivalence where there is homogeneity on the linguistic level of both source language and target language texts: a word for word translation. The second type is paradigmatic equivalence, where there is equivalence of the elements of a paradigmatic expressive axis: the elements of grammar, which Popovic regards as a higher category than lexical equivalence. The third type is Stylistic equivalence, where there is functional equivalence of elements in both original and translation, aiming at an expressive identity with an invariant of identical meaning. The last type is textual or syntagmatic equivalence, where there is equivalence of the syntagmatic structuring of a text, an equivalence of form and shape (Bassnett, 1980: 25). Translation involves far more than replacement of lexical and grammatical items; the process involves discarding the basic linguistic elements so as to achieve what Popovic calls expressive identity.
Eugene Nida who has applied a communication model for his theory of translation distinguishes between two types of equivalence, formal and dynamic. Formal equivalence focuses attention on the message itself, both in form and content. In such a translation one is concerned with such correspondences as poetry to poetry, sentence to sentence and concept to concept. Nida calls this type of translation a gloss translation which aims to allow the reader to understand as much of the source language context as possible. Dynamic equivalence is based on the principle of equivalent effect: the relationship between receiver of the target language message and the message is the same as that between the original receivers and the source language message (1964: 26). The emotive impact of the message is the same for the audience irrespective of the fact whether they belong to the source culture or target culture.

J.C Catford, in his *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*, makes an attempt to link translation with linguistics. His work opens with the words: “Any theory of translation must draw upon a theory of language – a general linguistic theory” (1965: 1). His main contribution to the field of translation theory is the introduction of the concepts of types and shifts of translation. Catford proposes very broad types of translation in terms of three criteria. The first criterion is the extent of translation: whether it is full translation or partial translation. In full translation the entire text is submitted to the translation process and every part of the source language is replaced by target language text material. Partial translation is where some part or parts of the source language text are left untranslated. The second criterion is the grammatical or phonological rank at
which the translation equivalence is established: whether it is rank-bound
translation or unbounded translation. Rank-bound translation involves a
deliberate attempt to consistently select target language equivalents at the same
rank in the hierarchy of grammatical units; for example, at the rank of
morpheme, word, group, clause or sentence. Unbounded translation is where
equivalences shunt up and down the rank scale, but tend to be at the higher
ranks—sometimes between larger units than the sentence. The last criterion is
the levels of language involved in translation: whether it is total translation or
restricted translation. In total translation, all the linguistic levels of the source
language are replaced by target language material. In restricted translation,
there is replacement of source language textual material by equivalent target
language textual material only at one level (1965: 21-25). There are two main
types of restricted translation, phonological translation and graphological
translation.

In addition to word-for-word, sentence-to-sentence and conceptual
translations, other scholars have suggested other approaches and methods of
translation. Peter Newmark, for example, has suggested communicative and
semantic approaches to translation. By definition, communicative translation
attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained
on the readers of the source language. Semantic translation, on the other hand,
attempts to render, as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the TL
allow, the exact contextual meaning of the original. Semantic translation is
accurate, but may not communicate well; whereas communicative translation
communicates well, but may not be very precise.
The translation process also has attained varied critical attention. For instance, Newmark contends that there are three basic translation processes:

a. the interpretation and analysis of the SL text;

b. the translation procedure (choosing equivalents for words and sentences in the TL),

c. and the reformulation of the text according to the writer's intention, the reader's expectation, the appropriate norms of the TL, etc. (1988: 56)

The processes, as Newmark states, are to a small degree paralleled by translation as a science, a skill, and an art.

Catford defines translation shifts as “departures from formal correspondence in the process of going from the source language to the target language” (1965:73). Catford argues that there are two main types of translation shifts, namely level shifts and category shifts. In level shifts the source language item at one linguistic level, for example, grammar, has a target language equivalent at a different level, for example, lexis. The category shifts are divided into four types: The first type is Structure-shifts, which involve a grammatical change between the structure of the source text and that of the target text. The second type is Class-shifts, when a source language item is translated with a target language item which belongs to a different grammatical class; for example a verb may be translated with a noun. The third type is Unit-shifts, which involve changes in rank. The fourth type is Intra-system shifts, which occur when source language and target language possess systems
which approximately correspond to each other formally as to their constitution, but when translation takes place it involves the selection of a non-corresponding term in the target language system (1965:78-80). For instance, the shift where the source language singular when translated becomes a target language plural.

However, theorists like James Holmes feel that the use of the term equivalence is perverse, for to ask for sameness is to ask too much. Dionyz Durisin argues that the translator of a literary text is not concerned with establishing equivalence of natural language but of artistic procedures. These procedures cannot be considered in isolation, but must be located within the specific cultural-temporal context within which they are utilized (Basnett,1980: 28). Equivalence in translation should not be approached as a search for sameness but rather it can be perceived as a dialectic between signs and structures within and surrounding the source language and target language texts. If complete equivalence is not possible in translation, there invariably follows questions of loss and gain. Eugene Nida discusses in detail the difficulties encountered by the translator when faced with the terms or concepts in the source language that do not exist in the target language. This leads to the question of untranslatability which is a prominent in translation studies.

Catford distinguishes two types of untranslatability, which he terms linguistic and cultural. On the linguistic level untranslatability occurs when there is no lexical or syntactical substitute in the target language for the source language item. Linguistic untranslatability is due to differences in the source
language and the target language. The other one is cultural untranslatability which is a rather complicated issue and is due to the absence in the target language culture of a relevant situational feature for the source language text.

Popovic also distinguishes two types of untranslatability without making a separation between the linguistic and the cultural. The first is defined as a problem of connotation:

A situation in which the linguistic elements of the original cannot be replaced adequately in structural, linear, functional or semantic terms in consequence of a lack of denotation or connotation. (Gentzler, 1993: 85)

The second type goes beyond the purely linguistic:

A situation where the relation of expressing the meaning, that is, the relation between the creative subject and its linguistic expression in the original does not find an adequate linguistic expression in translation. (Gentzler, 1993: 85-86)

As far as language is the primary modelling system within a culture, cultural untranslatability must be inevitably implied in any process of translation.

Itaman Even-Zohar is a theorist who discusses the place and function of translation within the cultural system. He has coined the term polysystem theory to describe his approach: a semiotic system is very rarely a uni-system but is necessarily a polysystem or a multiple system. It is a system of various systems which intersect with each other and partly overlap, using concurrently
different options, yet functioning as one structured whole the elements of which are interdependent. Translation as a system of transfer functions within the literary system which is itself part of a larger cultural syndrome (Bassnett, 1980: 26). Translation is a semiotic system which functions within a literary system that shares the characteristics of a cultural system.

The topic of translation and the figure of the translator always struggle with the marginalization they are driven to within the literary scene. Translation is widely considered a secondary phenomenon, with the translator mostly hidden behind the predominant author. In his essay “The Task of the Translator,” Walter Benjamin elevates translation to a level of the sublime that is probably never reached. This extraordinary piece, published as a preface to his own translations of Baudelaire’s “Tableaux Parisiens” in 1923, has highly influenced the theory of translation. For Benjamin translation is a means to aspire to “pure language” (1968:74). He establishes that a process of the supplement of languages takes place through translation consequent to the difference between source and target languages.

Benjamin’s project is so remarkable that it has an all-embracing notion of language as its basis: the world is made of language and the final aim is to understand this “textus” of the world to achieve harmony between the inadequate human languages and the language of God. This thought is highly influenced by Jewish mysticism and the Biblical idea of a pristine language, complete in itself, which existed in paradise and disintegrated by God after the Tower of Babel grounded. The human languages are only the incomplete pieces
of the pure and complete original. Benjamin builds his teleology on the basis of
this mystical idea: the final aim is to approach the divine language in which all
truths are hidden. But, this language is no longer communicative, but is totally
free of meaning. Translation is the decisive means to reach the final end: it
completes languages, puts together the disintegrated “modes of intention,”
Benjamin’s equivalent for the Saussurean “signifier.” It works towards the
perfection of the original which can be considered incomplete and which
requires translation for its completion: “Thus translation, ironically, transplants
the original into a more definitive linguistic realm … In translation the original
rises into a higher and purer linguistic air” (1968:75). Translation sublimates
the continuum of signifiers to a point of saturated perfection.

Benjamin feels that translations should not try to transfer meaning. It is
rather an effort to translate as close to the original as possible by transferring
its syntax and the mode of expressing concepts to the target language:

A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original,
does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though
reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the
more fully. (1968:79)

The translation should be carried out in such a way as to recognize the original
and the translation is regarded as fragments of a greater language.

In their introduction to the collection of essays Translation, History and
Culture, Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere dismiss the kinds of linguistic
theories of translation “which have just focussed on word or text as a unit,
but not moved beyond” (1992:4). They also dismiss “painstaking comparisons between originals and translations which do not consider the text in its cultural environment” (1992:5). Cultural dimensions gather importance in the translation scenario. Translation should be approached from the angle of Cultural Studies paradigm.

Sherry Simon notes the contribution of Cultural Studies to translation as an attempt that has radically altered the perspective of translation:

Cultural studies bring to translation an understanding of the complexities of gender and culture. It allows us to situate linguistic transfer within the multiple ‘post’ realities of today: post structuralism, post colonialism and post modernism.

(1996:136)

Cultural Studies finds in translation a platform to explore and explicate its essential premises.

Bassnett and Lefevere go beyond language and focus on the interaction between translation and culture. They illustrate how culture impacts and constrains translation and “on the larger issues of context, history and convention” (1992:11). The study of translation, like the study of culture, needs a plurality of voices. Similarly, the study of culture always involves an examination of the processes of encoding and decoding that also comprise translation. The move from translation as text to translation as culture and politics is what Mary Snell Hornby terms “cultural turn” (1998:14).
As a structural paradigm capable of bearing the weight of cultural politics, translation is an analogue of power and hegemony.

This new approach to translation based on its cultural and political dimensions focuses on the changing standards in translation over time: the power exercised in and on the publishing industry in pursuit of specific ideologies is an evidence to this trend. There are many emerging fields of specialization in Translation Studies: feminist writing and translation, translation as appropriation, translation and colonization, translation and ethnography, translation as mediation, translation as rewriting, translation as discovery, and gender metaphors and hegemonic constructs in translation. Translation is fully informed by the tensions that traverse all cultural representations. Translation is defined as a process of mediation which does not stand above ideology but works through it.

Lefevere in his seminal work *Translation, History and Culture* focuses particularly on the examination of those very concrete factors that systematically govern the reception, acceptance or rejection of literary texts: issues like power, ideology, institution and manipulation. The people involved in such power positions are the ones rewriting literature and governing its consumption by the general public. The motivation for such rewriting can be ideological as conforming to or rebelling against the dominant ideology, or poetological.
Lefevere recognises translation as a form of rewriting:

. . .the most obviously recognizable type of rewriting, and it is potentially the most influential because it is able to project the image of an author and/or those works beyond the boundaries of their culture of origin. (1992:9)

Lefevere describes the literary system in which translation functions as the one being controlled by three main factors. The first one is the professionals within the literary system. They include critics and reviewers, teachers and translators themselves, who decide on the poetics and often the ideology of the translated text. The second factor is the patronage outside the literary system. These are the powers, persons or institutions that can further or hinder the reading, writing and rewriting of literature. The last factor is the dominant poetics that aesthetically condition the period in which translation takes place.

Lefevere identifies three elements to this patronage. The first is the ideological component: this constrains the choice of subject and the form of its presentation. This definition of ideology is not restricted to the political. It is more generally the grillwork of form, convention and belief which orders our actions. Patronage is basically ideologically focussed. The second one is the economic component: this concerns the payment of writers and rewriters. The third one is the status component which explains the status of translation as well as the translator (1992:15). The ideological component dominates the other two.
There is a crucial interaction between poetics, ideology and translation. It can be seen that on every level of translation process, if linguistic principles are in conflict with ideological and/or poetological views, the latter tends to win. Theorists like Lefevere consider ideological leanings as the most important one where ideology refers to the translator’s ideology or the ideology imposed on him by patronage.

Antoine Berman in *L’épreuve de l’étranger: Culture et traduction dans l’Allemagne romantique* identifies twelve “deforming” tendencies, which reduce variation, leading to TT conformity:

1) Rationalization, where syntax, punctuation and sentence structure are altered.

2) Clarification, where things are rendered clear in the TT that are not meant to be clear in the ST. This can be done through paraphrase or explanation.

3) Expansion, where the TT is longer than ST through overtranslation.

4) Ennoblement, where some translators try to improve on the original style.

5) Qualitative impoverishment, where words and expressions are replaced with TT equivalents.
6) Quantitative impoverishment, where different TT words are used to replace the same ST word - different signifiers are used for the same signified.

7) Destruction of rhythm, where the rhythm of a text can be changed by change in word order and punctuation.

8) Destruction of underlying networks of signification, where individual words may not seem important by themselves, but play a significant role on a different level within the text. They may form a contextual link.

9) Destruction of linguistic patterning, where the systems in the original are destroyed.

10) Destruction of vernacular networks, where local speech patterns are replaced.

11) Destruction of expressions or idioms, where they are replaced with TT equivalents, removing the TT from the cultural environment.

12) The effacement of the superimposition of languages, where different forms of ST language are translated in the same way. (Munday, 2001:150)

The deformities are often an extension of the ideology or hegemonic scripts inherent in the act of translation.
One of the earliest direct references in this century to the politics inherent in the act of translation can be seen in Werner Winter’s essay “Translation as Political Action.” Marcia Nita Doron and Marilyn Gaddis Rose’s essay “The Economics and Politics of Translation” provides a simplistic analysis of the politics of translation. They regard publishing as a kind of market place. The term “political” is used here in the sense that it is enmeshed in effective history and relations of power.

The cultural and political agenda of translation has been elaborated by Lawrence Venuti while discussing the norms of translation:

Norms may be in the first instance linguistic or literary, but they will also include a diverse range of domestic values, beliefs, and social representations which carry ideological force in serving the interests of specific groups. And they are always housed in the social institutions where translations are produced and enlisted in cultural and political agendas. (1998:29)

Venuti considers foreignising strategy of translation as desirable to restrain the ethnocentric violence of translation. The other translation strategy, namely domestication, is seen by him as the dominating Anglo-American translation culture. He bemoans the phenomenon of domestication as it involves an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target language cultural values.

Translations are not made in a vacuum. Translators function in a given culture at a given time. They are much influenced by the overtones and underpinnings of their culture; they are often the product and producer of it.
Translators, through the subtle interplay of politics and power structures in their translations, often tend to perpetuate the hierarchical ladders perceived and preserved by a given culture and aid in the process of sanctifying the cultural Othering, practised as a form of hegemonic marginalization.

Translation is implicitly related to authority, legitimacy and ultimately, with power. Translation is not just a window opened to another world; it is rather a channel through which foreign influences can penetrate to the native culture, challenge and even subvert it. Translation can be used to legitimize the power of those who wield it in that culture. The use of translation as a hegemonic weapon or an oppressive measure is not a recent phenomenon. It has been prevalent since the beginnings of translation, though it is only with the widespread influence of the matters related to gender, culture and ideology that a deep critical insight into such poetological strategies comes to be fully recognised.

The use of translation as a platform of power politics and a space for hierarchical oppression can be best evidenced from what Edward Fitzgerald, the translator of the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayam, wrote to his friend E.B Cowell in 1857:

> It is an amusement for me to take what liberties I like with Persians, who (as I think) are not poets enough to frighten one from such excursions, and who really do want a little Art to shape them. (Lefevere, 1992: 4)
The “little Art”, of course, represents a knowledge of Western poetics and Western systems of discourses. Fitzgerald even dared to question the sensibility and the creative potential of the Persian authors. He contemptuously referred to them as: “…these Persians wanting in literary finesse” (Lefevere, 1992: 4). He counted the Persians’ lack of exposure to Western literary technique and epistemology as a deficiency amounted to lack of sensibility.

Translation is a powerful political weapon. It is a means of appropriating power to oneself. The translations of the Bible were no mere literary defiance. Translation as a metaphor of appropriating religious hegemony is evident here. The political significance of translation can be evidenced in Indian tradition too. The whole Bhakthi movement of poetry in India had the desire of translating the language of spirituality from Sanskrit to the languages of the people. However, translation as a political weapon is not always necessarily employed towards reducing the gap between the divine and the profane, the high and the low. In Europe its political purpose changed with the advent of colonialism.

The aim of the second great period of translation in modern Europe was to open up other cultural area, mainly of the Orient to Europe. The translation by William Jones, H.E Wilson, Edward Fitzgerald and those attempted and encouraged in Germany by Goethe differed in orientation from the earlier translations of Bible and Homer. The Romantic translations were aimed at raising the cultural status of the works translated. There was a hidden ethnographic agenda behind each of these translations, sometimes to
domesticate the Orient or tame the native. It is a strategy to know someone better with a view to keeping him/her in a perpetual status of subservience and sometimes to proclaim the superiority of one’s own cultural and literary canons. Translation often becomes a means of turning the colonial world into an object of consumption, exotic but not foreign.

Mahasweta Sengupta in her essay “Translation as Manipulation” recognizes this potential:

While choosing texts for rewriting, the dominant power appropriates only those texts that conform to the pre-existing discursive parameters of its linguistic networks. These texts are then rewritten largely according to a certain pattern that denudes them of their complexity and variety; they are presented as specimens of a culture that is simple, natural, and in the case of India other worldly or spiritual as well. (Dingwarey and Maier, 1996:159)

Such a rendition clearly justifies the colonizer’s ‘civilizing mission’, through which the inherent superiority of the colonizer’s culture is established. Translation involves distortion, subversion, manipulation and appropriation. A translator with a political objective is a traitor; he breaks the fidelity to the original.

With the advent of British power in India and with the spread of English education, a false value-structure emerged in India. In this value-structure, which was implemented further by the politics of translational activity,
everything British was considered inherently good. In literature, the most obvious consequences of this colonial value scheme was an indiscriminate institutionalization of English literature and a proliferation of translations with a known or unknown value politics favourable to the British. In his essay “Translation Theory: An Indian Perspective,” G. N. Devy points out:

The purely linguistic, and neutral theories of translation would be inadequate to understand the politically motivated colonial translation activity initiated by colonialism, the linguistic theories need to be supported by an awareness of the colonial discourse. (Mukherjee, 1998:63).

The political motivations of translation may not be transparent at the surface level. But when it is related to the entire cultural content within which it functions, these motives become evident.

Translation is not merely a linguistic activity. It is a cultural act. Sachidananda Mohanty, in “Insider/Outsider: A definition of Translation,” states: “All acts of translation, are an attempt to mediate between cultures, texts and nationalities” (Mukherjee, 1998:143). Translation has played an active role in the colonization process and in disseminating an ideologically motivated image of the colonized people. The colony can be seen as an imitative and inferior translational copy whose suppressed identity has been overwritten by the colonisers. Translation’s role in disseminating such ideological images has led Basnett and Trivedi to refer to the “shameful history of translation” (1999:5). In this context, translation can be used to subvert
identity: a counter translation can be used as an attempt to retrieve a submerged identity.

Tejaswini Niranjana's book *Siting Translation, History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context* examines translation theories from the perspective of inherent power relations:

In a post-colonial context the problematic of translation becomes a significant site for raising questions of representation, power, and historicity. The context is one of contesting and contested stories attempting to account for, to recount, the asymmetry and inequality of relations between peoples, races, languages. (1995:1)

In translation, the relationship between the two languages is hardly on equal terms. Niranjana draws attention to a rather overlooked fact that translation is between languages, which are hierarchically related, and that it is a mode of representation in another culture. When the relationship between the cultures and languages is that of colonizer and colonized, translation

...produces strategies of containment. By employing certain modes of representing the other-which it thereby also brings into being--translation reinforces hegemonic versions of the colonized, helping them acquire the status of what Edward Said calls representations or objects without history. (1995:3)

She points out in the introduction that her concern is to probe “the absence, lack, or repression of an awareness of asymmetry and historicity in several
kinds of writing on translation” (1995:9). Her attempt is to evolve a diachronic approach to Translation Studies.

Translation into English has generally been used by the colonial power to construct a rewritten image of the ‘East’ that has then come to stand for the truth. Tejaswini Niranjana’s *Siting Translation : History, Post-Structuralism and the Colonial Context* presents an image of the post-colonial as “still scored through by an absentee colonialism” (1995:8). The missionaries who ran schools for the colonized and who also performed the role as linguists and translators, the ethnographers who recorded grammars of native languages, and the Orientalists who studied and translated the Oriental texts participated in the enormous project of collection and codification on which colonial power was based. Niranjana specifically attacks the role of translation within this power structure: “Translation as a practice shapes, and takes shape within, the asymmetrical relations of power that operate under colonialism” (1995:2). She sees literary translation as one of the discourses: the others being education, theology, historiography and philosophy, which “inform the hegemonic apparatuses that belong to the ideological structure of the colonial rule” (1995:33). Literary translation is an explicitly innocuous creative act which can implicitly anchor any kind of ethnographic agenda analogous to hegemony or oppression.

The West, or for that matter the Centre, has always tried to create an image of the East as the Other so as to confirm the unperturbed continuation of
the hegemonic structures of power. This is evident in what Edward Said speaks in his “Crisis in Orientalism”:

Orientalism is a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident." Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, "mind," destiny, and so on. (1985:2-3)

Said presents a compelling and cogent portrait of a luminescent, rational, Cartesian West systematically inventing and sustaining a dark, pre-rational, exotic Orient to serve as the "Other" against which the topography of a superior Occident culture and history can continuously emerge in sharp focus. This is a strategy of cultural Othering: the Orient is constructed as the Other of Europe.

This ethnographic project is evident right from the early practices of oriental translations including that of Edward Fitzgerald’s translation of Omar Khayam’s Rubaiyat, William Jones’s translation of Sakuntala, Charles Wilkin’s translation of Bhagavat Gita, Jones and Wilkin’s Menu’s Institutes and H.H. Wilson’s Kalidasa. Jones untiringly emphasised the importance of Oriental studies and translations to the efficient administration of British
Colonies. Even though they were masked under the sublime notion of the quintessential humanistic enterprise of bridging the gap between peoples, such endeavours prompt the surfacing of the rigid dichotomies between modern and primitive, West and non-West, civilized and barbaric, culture and nature. Jones considered translation as part of the ethnographic project to show the world the *barbaric* literary continents or literary islands and to civilize the barbaric communities (Lefevere, 1992: 56). Translation is a part of the colonial discourse designed with a view to domesticating the Orient. It is part of the colonial agenda of naturalizing or dehistoricizing this series of oppositions. The naturalizing, dehumanizing move is accompanied by a situating of the “primitive” or the “Oriental” in a teleological scheme that shows them to be imperfect realizations of the Spirit or of Being.

The foremost scholar who located and translated the literature of the Orient for the West was William Jones, President of the Asiatic Society of Bengal and a pioneer in Orientalist scholarship. Working from the premise of cultural superiority and faith in the advanced nature of European civilization, Jones divided the world into two spheres, where “reason and taste were the grand prerogatives of the European minds” whereas the “Asiatics soared to loftier heights in the sphere of imagination” (Lefevere, 1992: 62). Jones was happy to concede the Asiatic to the domain of the imaginative and the exotic because it did not fit into the Cartesian world of rational discourse. His translation of the Sanskrit text *Gitagovinda* designates it as a mystical text whereas in the Hindu tradition it was more human than mystical, combining the devotional, the erotic and the intensely poetic at the same time.
He, as a translator, denuded the original of its richness and variety in order to make the poem conform to an “image” acceptable to the “European taste.”

In his article “Orientalism,” Said observes that the way of controlling the Orient is by constructing the Orient as the Other of Europe. Orientalism is a terrain of discourse that constructs the Orient as the Other of Europe. As translation is akin to an exercise in literary criticism in its use as a form of interpretation, it is a site of ideological manipulation. The mystery and fear that shrouded the Orient necessitated the innovation of a literary discourse that could tame and transpire it. The first step in this direction was to construct an imaginative geography that would in turn fuse a physical geography. As analogues, culture and power can be represented in identically structured paradigms. Translation as a form of Cultural Studies involves textual politics.

The notion of a primitive innocence, of simplicity and naturalness, and, above all, of mysticism or spirituality become the basic notes of all future rewritings about the cultures of India. These are the domains in which the colonized can be safely contained and the colonial mission justified. The cultural stereotype of the colonized race as childlike, innocent and primitive has been constructed through translations so as to demonstrate the need to help them grow up. This is a disguised way to contain the colonial subject within a discursive domain that does not clash with the more sophisticated, advanced and “civilized” cultural values of the West.

The images of India that came through these translations were quite consistent with the colonialist agenda of maintaining superiority.
They perfectly agree with the image that Macaulay portrayed earlier in his “Minute on Indian Education”:

I have no knowledge of either Sanscrit or Arabic. But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit works. I have conversed both here and at home with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native culture of India and Arabia. … It is, I believe no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanscrit language is less valuable than what may be found in most paltry abridgements used at preparatory schools in England. (Lefevere, 1992: 241)

The political and hegemonic agenda of translations is evident when Macaulay specifically insisted that he gained such a thorough estimation by reading translations.

The autotranslations of Rabindranath Tagore’s poetry in English clearly reveals the hegemonic power of the “images” that existed in the discourse of the English language regarding the imaginative literature in India. An innovator and pioneer who shaped the modern period of Bengali and other literatures, he presents a very different facet of himself in his translations. He manipulated the translations of his poem to suit the prevailing notions of the “poet-prophet” from the East, and in doing so he was simply submitting to the hegemonic
power of “images” that had been constructed through Orientalist translations (Mukherjee, 1994: 107). His creative genius in translation is appropriated to suit the sensibility of Western readers.

Translation of Indian culture was used to further the British technique of indirect rule. Niranjana points out that Ethnographic and Orientalist images of Africa and Islamic political traditions helped to legitimize colonialism by their refusal to discuss how Europe had imposed its power and its conception of a just political order (1995:78). The colonial discourses of translation reproduced the colonial divide in an inverted form as a colonial “us” interpreting or representing a colonized “them.” This process of using translation as a medium of power establishment is at work in the postcolonial space where the colonized “them” gets shifted to categories determined by race, class, caste and gender.

The politics of translation is closely related to the politics involved in the prominence acquired by English Studies in the Commonwealth. In his Introduction to Literary Theory Terry Eagleton connects the popularity of English Studies to the emergence of working class education and of women’s education. English Studies has assumed a paradoxical dimension: it has been at once a tool for nationalist discourse and a colonialist discourse. Colonialist writings in English have tried to perpetuate colonial rule in British colonies, whereas the nationalist writings have attempted to replace the coloniser with the native governments. These conflicting interests in English studies have been levelled through a homogenised literary history published by the two great universities in Briton; The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature edited by George Sampson and The Cambridge History of English and
American Literature edited by Arthur Compton Rickett and Thomas Hake
recognised English authors of colonies on par with British writers.

This is a deliberate attempt to neutralise the political weight of
nationalist writings. The elements of resistance in these writings have been
ignored by erasing the difference between authors of colonies and British
authors. Only Stephen Greenblatt objected to this type of literary history which
he considers mixed and impure where the voices of the victorious and the
vanquished are put together. The colonisers deliberately ignored the difference
and created the false impression that they were accommodative and reconciling.

New Historicism explicates an awareness of the contexts of power relations in a
literary text. In his critical exposition of New Historicism and Cultural
materialism, John Brannigan states: “New Historicism is a mode of critical
interpretation which privileges power relations as the most important context
for texts of all kinds. As a critical practice it treats literary texts as a space
where power relations are made visible”(1998: 6). New Historicism is a
discursive site where elements of history, culture and power overlap.

A major area where translation wields its power to create new classes of
binary opposites is that of gender equations. Sherry Simon, in her
Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission,
criticises translation studies for using the term culture “as it referred to an
obvious and unproblematic reality”(1996:9). Simon approaches translation
from the angle of gender studies.
Translators and women have been historically weaker figures in their respective hierarchies: translators are subservient to authors, women inferior to men. Woman and translator have been relegated to the same position of discursive inferiority. Though translation is equated with female gender in the context of its assumed inferiority to the original, there are situations in which translation in the hands of a male translator contributes to the marginalisation of woman. The mainstream language is male-stream language which can be appropriated as an instrument of oppression. The language and style, the imagery, the syntax, the tone and spirit of the surface and deep structures, all can be distorted to perpetuate masculine hegemony. There is a language of sexism in translation studies, with its images of dominance, fidelity, faithfulness, and betrayal.

Language is one of the means of classifying and ordering the world. Language is at once a means of representing and even manipulating reality. Linguistic structures bring out a realistic world which, if inaccurate, leads to misunderstanding. If the rules which underlie our language system or symbolic order are invalid, then the audience are continually deceived: “The politics of translation takes on a massive life of its own if you see language as the process of meaning construction” (Venuti, 2000: 397). Language often works as a discourse of confinement. The power to encode and decode the language makes a phatic divide into the dominant group occupying the pivotal position as the masters of the discourse and the marginalised groups kept under a panoptic surveillance as the captives of the discourse they fail to decode.
Dale Spender questions man made language as an arbiter of reality:

The group which has the power to ordain the structure of language, thought and reality has the potential to create a system of beliefs which is beyond challenge. The group which has the power to ordain the structure of language, thought and reality has the potential to create a world in which they are the central figures, while those who are not of their group are peripheral and therefore may be exploited. In the patriarchal order, this potential has been realized. (2003:147)

Patriarchy as a dominant ideology has created its own strategies to perpetuate its reign in the society. One of the means to perpetuate patriarchy is through the structure of language. The man-made language is a deceptive medium which fortifies the octopus-like grip of patriarchy in the society. Those who do not conform to the parameters of this language are driven to the periphery. Spender further explains the male role in the construction of linguistic structures:

Males, as the dominant group, have produced language, thought and reality. Historically it has been the structures, the categories and the meanings which have been invented by the males and they have been validated by reference to other males. (2003: 147)

Language and the conditions for its use structure a patriarchal order. This order is characterised by a denial of linguistic freedom and equality to the female Other.
One of the semantic rules which is operative in language is that of the male-as norm. While this rule operates, the world is classified on the premise that the standard or normal human being is the male and when there is but one standard, those who are not male are allocated to a category of deviation. Hence the fundamental classification scheme is one which divides humanity into two equal parts: into those who are plus male and those who are minus male.

The man-made language is at play in translations, especially where the translator is a man. It is commonly observed that the back translation of a source text authored by a woman but translated by a man would often fail to yield a gynocentric text, but an androcentric one. This is because the language of translation essentially contains the metaphors of gender within it. A scrutiny of every aspect of the language from its structure to the conditions of its use would lead to the detection of both blatant and subtle means by which the edifice of male supremacy has been assembled leading to the eclipsing of the female presence.

Sherry Simon gives examples of Canadian feminist translators from Quebec like Barbara Godard and Nicole Brossard who seek to emphasise their identity and ideological stance in the translation project. They make translation a means of reinventing and sternly asserting the presence and power of female identity and creativity. One of these, Barbara Godard, theorist and translator, is openly assertive about the manipulation this involves:

The feminist translator, affirming her critical difference, her delight in interminable re-reading and re-writing, flaunts the signs of her manipulation of the text. (1980:97)
Translation becomes a site of manipulative dimensions, operating with specific ideologies and policies.

In the introduction to a translation of Lise Gauvin’s *Lettres d’une autre* by another committed feminist translator, Susanne de Lotbiniere-Harwiid explains her translation strategy in political terms:

My translation practice is a political activity aimed at making language speak for women. So my signature on a translation means: this translation has used every translation strategy to make the feminine visible in language. (Simon, 1996: 9)

One such strategy she uses is the treatment of linguistic markers of gender. This includes the use of a bold “e” in the word “one” to emphasise the feminine and the capitalization of “M” in “HuMan Rights” to show the implicit sexism (Simon, 1996: 21). Feminism has been one of the most potent forms of cultural identity to take on linguistic and social expression over the last decades. In this context, Spivak appropriately remarks: “The task of the feminist translator is to consider language as a clue to the working of gendered agency” (Venuti, 2000: 397). The works of feminist scholars have helped to emerge a clear sense of language as a site of contested meanings. Spivak considers translation as an important approach in pursuing the larger feminist agenda of achieving women’s `solidarity'. Translation for Spivak is an act of understanding the Other as well as the Self. For her it has a political dimension, as it is a strategy that can be consciously employed. She uses the feminine adjectives like submission, intimacy and understanding for theorizing translation.
Language is essentially androcentric and feminists like Alicia Ostriker feel the need to purgate it to get rid of the masculine traits hindering the expression of female identity and selfhood. In her *Stealing the Language*, she speaks about the need to infiltrate in the androcentric elements and to bring in gynocentric views. Her call is essentially about stealing the male-centred language so as to make it essentially feminine, capable of expressing the essential female in literature.

Gender is an element of identity and experience which, like other cultural constructs, takes form through social consciousness. Gender is never a primary identity emerging out of the depths of the self, but a discursive construction enunciated at multiple sites. The meaning of translation within a universe of shifting borders has often been challenged by feminist critics, emphasising the power of translation to define and articulate Otherness. Spivak explains this matter in “The Politics of Translation”:

…the way in the staging of language produces not only the sexed subject but the gendered agent, by a version of centering, persistently disrupted by the rhetoricity, indicating contingency. Unless demonstrated otherwise, this for me remains the condition and effect of dominant and subordinate gendering. (Venuti, 2000:408)
Spivak finds translation as a medium that can be appropriated for the continuation of gender politics. Materials inimical and hostile to the assertion of the female identity can be cleverly let in through translation.

Translation Studies has been impelled by many of the concerns central to feminism: they are the distrust of traditional hierarchies and gendered roles, deep suspicion of rules defining fidelity, and the questioning of universal standards of meaning and value. Language intervenes actively in the creation of meaning. Language does not simply mirror reality; it contributes to reality with possible distortions in reality. Translation refers to a process of interlinguistic transfer. Translators communicate, re-write, and even manipulate a text in order to make it available to the target language public. They can use language as cultural intervention, as part of an effort to alter or assert expressions of domination. Language can often act as a legitimating tool of patriarchal authority.

Spivak brings together feminist, postcolonial and post-structuralist approaches in “The Politics of Translation.” She speaks out against the Western feminists who expect feminist writing from outside Europe to be translated into the language of power, English. Such translation is often expressed in “translationese,” which eliminates the identity of the politically less powerful individuals and cultures.
Translation becomes a means of creating and articulating Otherness, be it cultural, ethnographic or sexual. In this regard, Spivak points out:

In the act of whole sale translation into English, there can be the betrayal of the democratic ideal into the law of the strongest. This happens when all the literature of the Third World gets translated into a sort of with-it translatese, so that literature by a woman in Palestine begins to resemble, in the feel of its prose, something by a man in Taiwan. The rhetoricity of Chinese and Arabic! The cultural politics of high-growth, capitalist Asia-Pacific, and devastated West Asia! Gender difference inscribed and inscribing these differences. (Venuti,2000:400)

Spivak is concerned with the ideological consequences of the translation of Third World literature into English and the distortion it entails.

Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" best demonstrates her concern for the processes whereby postcolonial studies ironically reinscribe, co-opt, and rehearse neo-colonial imperatives of political domination, economic exploitation, and cultural erasure. She addresses vital issues: the postcolonial critic unknowingly complicates the task of imperialism. She doubts whether "postcolonialism" is a specifically first-world, male-privileged, academically institutionalized discourse that classifies and surveys the East in the same measure as the actual modes of colonial dominance it seeks to dismantle.

What Spivak says about the attempts to theorise postcolonial subject is pertinent to the task of translating the third world subject. The subject position
adopted by the translator and the hidden politics in his attempt to comprehend and voice the subaltern consciousness is open to debate. There are silences in the subaltern text that refuse to be translated, silences which are rather more significant than the voices. In this regard, Spivak asks:

How can we touch the consciousness of the people even as we investigate their politics? With what voice consciousness can the subaltern speak? (1988:285)

Spivak suggests that any attempt from the outside to ameliorate their condition by granting them collective speech invariably will encounter more serious problems: a logocentric assumption of cultural solidarity among a heterogeneous people, and a dependence on western intellectuals to "speak for" the subaltern condition rather than allowing them to speak for themselves. As Spivak argues, by speaking out and reclaiming a collective cultural identity, subalterns will in fact re-inscribe their subordinate position in society. The academic assumption of a subaltern collectivity becomes akin to an ethnocentric extension of Western logos--a totalizing, essentialist "mythology"--that does not account for the heterogeneity of the colonized body politic.

The position of the subaltern woman is more deeply inscribed with political equations. The ideological representation of the subaltern female is a problematic issue:

Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. Both as object of colonialist historiography and as a subject of insurgency, the ideological
construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. (Spivak, 1998: 287)

The endeavour to translate the subaltern, and especially if the subaltern is a woman, becomes problematic and turns out to be a site of political and cultural manipulations and appropriations.

Translation is primarily a creative act carried out through the medium of language. Language is a deceptively political medium. It is not a passive or neutral medium that allows an experience to be represented neutrally. The reality represented by language is a language-specific reality. It creates epistemological structures with ideological gravity. Translation is also an act of generalising the contents of the literary text. Any act of generalising or universalising a discourse is an attempt at depoliticising the experience represented in the text or its political message. A translation has to overcome the innate nature of depoliticization associated with the linguistic medium of translation. He/she has to skillfully evoke the subversive structures of language to overcome the inherent nature of depoliticization.

Translation is a process of carrying across from one language to another, from one culture to another. But in the process of carrying across the peripheral layers of the text, it also pronounces certain deep layers wrought with ideological, political, ethnographic, cultural and gender constructs. Translation ceases to be a mere linguistic act, neutral and simple but is rather a cultural act with its own equations of power and dominance, centre and margin.
It is no more an innocent aesthetic activity but one which tells the tales of constructing Otherness.

The inherent politics of translation attains massive scales when the texts in question are subaltern texts. This is magnified to huge proportions when the texts are oral narratives. They undergo the twin processes of transliteration and translation. The autobiographies of two women belonging to multiple crosspoints of marginality, C.K Janu’s *Mother Forest* and Nalini Jameela’s *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* are typical cases in point. These subaltern autobiographies evade easy understanding and hence easy translation. The texts as such imbued with complicated cultural dimensions house silences rather than voices and gaps rather than words. The task of the translators is to comprehend and unveil these voids. But the cultural complexity of the subalterns and the intensity and shades of marginalization that they are burdened with cannot be fully experienced by an outsider. Every human being is deeply modeled by cultural underpinnings and one’s socio-cultural network deeply influences one’s perception. When the cultures belong to two different poles, an ideal cross over is difficult to achieve which definitely hinders the process of translation. This is true of both the texts in question.

*Mother Forest*, as a subaltern text by the tribal leader, clearly explicates the civilized society’s interest in the tribal life as, at its best, materialistic in nature. What they have sought to do is commodification of tribal culture and heritage. The tribals are reduced to mere show case pieces. Folk arts department has taken over their customs like *gaddiga*.
For the civil society they are just paraded pieces for leisure. The civilized society excavates the tribal traditions and customs and celebrates them as products of the market. The sanctified rituals and rites, art forms and music of the tribals are dragged into the mindless clutches of the market. They are brought under the demonic forces of consumerism. Even the attempt to project Janu’s life story before the civilized world should be doubted as a reflection of the consumerist forces in action.

Sexuality is a cultural construct. Just as Jameela shows how she has used sexuality as a means to earn her livelihood and how the moral and ethical consciousness of society with its male bias reflects the ideological equations in action, the very act of translating and marketing her text should also been seen as extensions of the play of hegemonic equations. Manipulation of the subaltern consciousness and appropriation of their language to suit the expectations of civilized society burden the autobiographies with pressures of politically motivated hegemonic forces. Basil Hatim and Ian Mason observe: "The translator's motivations are inextricably bound up with the socio-cultural context in which the act of translating takes place," and "Consequently, it is important to judge translating activity only within a social context" (1990: 12). They underline the socio-cultural dimensions of translation.

Janu’s and Jameela’s autobiographies when taken as reflections of their ideas, convictions, aspirations and protests are indeed specimens of subaltern resistance. However, the written texts both in Malayalam and the translated pieces in English come under debatable critical perspective. Janu and Jameela,
being illiterate or semi literate subaltern women, articulate their life story. They do not write them but produce oral texts. These oral texts in the process of being converted into English written pieces undergo the manipulative mechanics of transliteration and translation. The fact that these are done by people belonging to a totally different plane of social stratification raises issues of political and ideological weight. The very authenticity of *Mother Forest* and *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* comes under critical glance.

The oral texts undergo two kinds of appropriations and mediations. The quintessential question is whether people belonging to a different social stratum, the centre, comprehend, imbibe and represent the essence of the subaltern woman’s psyche in all its intensity and wholeness. It is doubtful whether the yearnings and longings, the frustrations and thwarted hopes, the fire of anger and protest, the gush of resistance and resilience that criss-cross the labyrinth of her mental landscape accessible to an outsider. It is the case of the center representing the margin with sincerity. Critics doubt whether it is possible for an alien tongue like English to capture the native experiences; whether the language of oppression and power articulate the loss and fragmentation of the dispossessed. The ultimate question is whether these translations are examples of alternative and counter hegemonic use of English language: an effective form of resistance to colonial oppression through language.
Jacques Derrida, in his *The Truth in Painting*, emphasizes the multiple possibilities of presentation and representation:

The act of representation is a complex process that involves the mediation of a subject in a given socio-cultural and historic context. It is not neutral and transparent but highly complex and contextual. (1987:6)

Representing the subaltern is imbued with equations of power and hegemony. It is inherently coloured with ideological parlances.

Janu’s autobiography is an oral one. This phonocentric text is graphocentricised by Bhaskaran. Jameela’s text is also an oral narrative which is later graphocentricised. Jameela’s text has been graphocentricised first by I. Gopinath. The manipulative measures at play are evident from the fact that Jameela herself had rejected this version as unauthentic and went for a second revised edition. Graphocentricisation itself is a major form of mediation that the texts undergo. Since speech is logocentric, speech is more authentic than writing: that is, orality is authenticity. Bhaskaran and the transliterators shut the nuances and fissures within the graphic mould. The arresting of the freedom of the text within the four walls of written script is a form of oppression. Written or printed representation of words can be labels: real spoken words cannot be. Graphocentricising the phonic text is like labeling it, objectifying
and slaughtering it. What Walter J. Ong says is relevant in this context:

> Writing is a particularly pre-emptive and imperialist activity that tends to assimilate other things to itself... though words are grounded in oral speech, writing tyrannically locks them into a visual field forever. (1982:12)

It involves the phonic text in a new set of power relations.

Graphocentricisation also opens the texts to a new form of politics. It involves the texts in a new process of signification. Writing develops codes in a language which are different from oral codes in the same language. It drags the texts into the problems of representation and semiotics. A new set of signs, signifieds and signifiers operate within the texts. It provides a new set of arbitrary relations to the psyche of the reader. The gap between the teller and the receiver is thus widened. This intrinsic characteristic of writing achieves ideological and political magnitude when it is mediated by a third person. Writing has an economy of its own and it cannot simply transmit unchanged what it receives from speech. Ambiguity, polysemy and so on find their way into the graphic representation whereas the oral text is synonymous with clarity and transparency. The oral narrative defies deconstruction and is authentic. Orality is logocentricity and orality is authenticity.

Graphocentricization of the text appropriates the text in more than one way. It negates the authority of the articulating self. This is a major oppressive measure when the text is a resistance text. The articulating authority is an
intersection of different cross points of marginalisation. Articulation is the bold attempt on the part of the narrative voice to achieve a definition of self, which in Janu’s case is synonymous with the self of her community. It is this noble aspiration of the subaltern that is thwarted by problematising the subjectivity of the articulating self. The process of graphocentricization thus robs the texts of their basic motive of offering resistance. It minimizes the texts’ prime responsibility of questioning and resisting established norms of oppression. Graphocentricization is nothing but a form of limiting the freedom of oral narrative. It devoices the voice of the voiceless.

Language is essentially phallocentric. It is inherently man-made and is scripted with patriarchal equations. The symbolic order of the male-centred language, according to Lacan, is represented by the presence of phallus. By graphocentricizing the oral narratives of Janu and Jameela, the transliterators have also phallocentricized them. Since language is phallocentric, it subsumes the feminine into a masculine universal. The reality of the woman articulated in her own tongue with distinct nuances of her own community cannot be represented in a phallocentric mould.

The translation of the texts into English is a strategy of appropriation. Language is never an apolitical medium. It is a deeply political medium. The choice of language is a political choice and in itself contains hegemonic equations. Language is the medium through which reality is created and represented: “Medium is the message” (Ong, 1982: 23). The choice of language plays an important role in manipulating reality, overtly or covertly. It is our key
to understand the self of the text and the reality it tries to represent. Translating a native oral text into the language of the oppressor is paramount to obliterating the very existence of the oral narrative. English language is inherently colonialistic and imperialistic. It reinforces patriarchal premises. In this context, N Prasantha Kumar points out:

As a colonialist discourse English has an inherent quality to fortify imperialism or colonialism vicariously through distorted imagery of the colonized and similar politics by other means. As consciousness is mediated through language, the choice of language forced on the articulating voice can impede the spontaneous representation of the unconscious… the conflict between the native and non-native languages offers a kind of resistance to the native’s/tribals’ attempt to preserve their culture and identity. (2)

Subaltern writing is a construct of oppression. The representation of this oppression through a mediated language is problematic. This is especially so in the case of Mother Forest and The Autobiography of a Sex Worker for they are mediated on more than one front.

Mother Forest and The Autobiography of a Sex Worker are cultural constructs. What is being communicated through them are strong cultural sentiments. In Janu’s autobiography the very process of articulation is nothing but an attempt at cultural preservation. Jameela’s autobiography treats sexuality as a cultural construct and speaks for the community of sex workers.
Newmark defines culture as "the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression" (1988: 94). He also remarks: "Culture: Objects, processes, institutions, customs, ideas peculiar to one group people" (1988: 282). There is an intricate relationship between culture and language: language is a vehicle which reflects cultural specificity, rather than part of culture (Hatim, 1990: 237). Culture and language are perhaps two independent but closely linked systems. Trying to represent the language of the subaltern culture through an alien tongue is doing disservice to the very attempt of the subalterns to give voice to their specificity.

Translation is essentially a homogenization of medium and unification of content. It is an extension of the mainstream society’s attempt to cut at the roots of the minority’s specificity. Homogenization obliterates differences thereby endangering the very essence of the subaltern/native community’s identity and existence. Any form of homogenization and unification is political and is loaded with hierarchical paradigms. This is what happens in the translation of Janu’s and Jameela’s oral autobiographies into English. Translation becomes an attempt at depoliticising the ideological content of the narrative. It is a strategy of questioning and suppressing the very politics articulated in the texts. It encompasses those forces of oppression that the texts are so eloquent about thereby belittling the very purpose of their production. Their texts are about the right to be different, where homogenization would mean an offence, and the right to be equal, where the dwelling upon difference would be synonymous with oppression or with the prevalence of power politics.
Mother Forest and The Autobiography of a Sex Worker are subaltern texts. The articulating voice is that of woman from the margins. The articulating subjectivity is a gendered subjectivity. The articulating authority is an amalgam of racial, ethnic and gender identities. Hers is a self that is marginalized and subjugated at more than one front. She is the marginalized among the marginalized. Forces of class, colour, gender, patriarchy, race and status act jointly to erase her presence. The subaltern text is an attempt to affirm her presence. It is an attempt to resist attempts at erasure. But being a subaltern text, it contains fissures and gaps, silences and unvoiced murmurings. It is these unseen presences in the text that are more important in understanding the essence of the text. It is in them the key to the soul of the text lies. According to Spivak, a translator must “surrender” to the text, as translation is the most intimate act of reading. It is an act of submitting to the rhetorical dimension of the text. For Spivak, this is more of an erotic act than an ethical one. A total surrender to the nuances of the text, completely imbibing and reveling in the hidden intricacies of the text, becomes problematic in the case of these two subaltern texts. This is because of the very density and convolution of the culture involved, marginalized and totally subjugated but powerful and dynamic. The threads are pretty enigmatic and the pulses too elusive. It is rather impossible for the graphocentric, phallocentric production of the oral narratives to capture these key elements of the subaltern texts. They get lost in the process of transliteration and translation. This is especially so when the mediations are done by people twice removed from the articulating authority,
as being male and belonging to the centre in Janu’s case and in Jameela’s case by someone sharing a totally different social space, economically and ethically.

There remains the question whether culture could be translated at all. All experiences – of both the here and the beyond – have been translated into the language of culture, but the experience of culture itself no longer finds any language that it could be translated into. Culture is untranslatable, because it is itself the ultimate translation. This complicated nature of culture poses problems for the translator when the text in question is a deeply cultural product and as such lives by and breathes culture. It is not the language that is to be translated, but culture itself and when culture and language become so entwined and interwoven the question becomes a crucial one. *Mother Forest* can attain the purpose of its existence only if it uses the ungrammatical, the typical tribal speech. Only this tongue, very unorthodox and may be defiled too can express the purity of the tribal culture. Toril Moi defines textual politics as a matter of “right content being represented in the correct realist form” (1985:7). Any text is a synthesis of politics and aesthetics. So translation involves the process of the politically right content being represented in the appropriate realist form: it is a synthesis of the ideological content and appropriate form. For the politics of the writer is evident not only in the content but also in the form of the literary text. The attempt to adhere to the strict grammar of the English language often sacrifices the very soul of the text. Janu’s autobiography is a communally constructed oral narrative and it is the collective consciousness of the whole community that speaks through her text. The strong solidarity that exists in the tribal community, the consciousness of the “we” as against “I” is
what adds power to Janu’s narrative. One strong explication of resistance is this collective solidarity bound by a profound culture. The English translation however could not retain this sense of “we” always and had to resort to “I” in fidelity to the authoritarian syntactic system of the language. What is sadly sacrificed here is the very core of the meaningful existence of the tribal community.

Specifically as the language of culture, the language used in subaltern narrative is the language of politics and emancipation. The language of the texts, in its pre-translated version communicates the sparks of resistance. Understanding utterances is not simply a matter of knowing the meanings of the words uttered and the way in which they are combined. It also involves drawing inferences on the basis of non-linguistic information and the assumption that language clothes the motives. For communities who have been denied voice and articulation for centuries, language is not just a medium but a powerful weapon. If the power of language needs to be unleashed in translation, it has to be retained with the same idiosyncrasies and gradations, however ungrammatical it might be in an alien tongue like English. Both the autobiographies fail on this count. Nalini Jameela’s autobiography in its Malayalam version narrates many past events in present tense. There is a non-adherence to tense forms which might as well be a mark of her non-conformist personality. The English translation however conforms to the grammatical rules of the language many a times, describing the past event in
past tense itself. On being asked the reason for her disparity in tense pattern, Jameela responds:

That’s the way my memory is. I remember my past in moving pictures, like a film, with scenes that are sharp in my mind. My very first memory, the one where my grandmother is crawling towards us. . . I can clearly see her elongated earlobes dangling as she came up. Perhaps it’s also because of the kind of past I’ve survived – every step in my life has been a grim battle. At each stage, I’d look back at the danger that I had escaped. Often I would marvel at how I survived, and then I would relax, once I’d seen that all it took to overcome apparently insurmountable difficulties as a little effort. I suppose it’s the habit of looking back so frequently that has kept my memory alive and clear. (135)

Memories of battles fought and won aid as positive forces driving the life of a subaltern ahead. It is because they still feel the tears and pain of yesterday with the same vigour, it is because the fire of protest and resistance still burns with the same fervour in their heart that these subaltern women have dared to speak out and voice their predicament. The language used, correspondingly, resonates with the immediacy and intensity of the memories they had. Language becomes a tool of resistance not only in its content but also in its form. It is this positive performative power of subaltern language that is appropriated with the
obliteration of the use of present tense for past events and the adherence to the authority of grammatical rules of the language of colonial power.

The language of the Malayalam versions of the autobiography is unconventional in its sentence structure, use of slangs, tense pattern and so on. The rhythm of utterances is in tune with the specificity of their culture and social positioning. This is true of both *Mother Forest* and *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker*. The natural colloquial rhythm, which in the case of C.K Janu communes with the unrestricted flow and music of nature herself, is part of the overall motive of resistance. Nalini Jameela is proud to present herself as a person who refuses to bow down and conform. She revels in being a non-conformist, be it by being a sex-worker and proud about it, or by being the first sex worker to write an autobiography and courageous enough to withdraw it and revise it. Her language also is imbued with the rare quality of non-conformism. She thwarts the rules of grammar and rhetoric and speaks in an uninhibited open mode. The way that language is used in these two subaltern texts is akin to what Bhakthin has called the carnivalesque. Carnival can be traced back to the Dionysian festivities of the Greeks and the Saturnalia of the Romans; enjoyed its apogee of both observance and symbolic meaning in the High Middle Ages. Much more than the mere cessation of productive labour, carnival represented an alternative cosmovision characterized by the ludicrous undermining of all norms. The carnivalesque principle abolishes hierarchies, levels social classes, and creates another life free from conventional rules and restrictions. Bakhtin likens the carnivalesque in literature to the type of activity that often takes place in the carnivals of popular culture. In the carnival social
hierarchies of everyday life—their solemnities and pieties and etiquettes, as well as all ready-made truths—are profaned and overturned by normally suppressed voices and energies. Thus, fools become wise, kings become beggars; opposites are mingled. The carnivalized literary text de-privileges the authoritative voice of hegemony through their mingling of “high culture” with the profane. For Bakhtin, it is within literary forms which are carnivalesque that one finds the site of resistance to authority and the place where cultural, and potentially political, change can take place. The subaltern autobiographical narratives of C.K Janu and Nalini Jameela are carnivalesque. They refute the hegemonic rules of language and prioritises the profane such as the use of class dialects and mixing of tenses. The English translations however have not been able to retain the full potentiality of the carnivalesque nature of the oral narratives or their Malayalam transliterations.

The language of the oral autobiographies of the two subaltern women, C.K Janu and Nalini Jameela, extends far beyond hegemonic policies. Bakhtin has always seen language as the means in which ideologies get articulated. For Bakhtin, as for Althusser, language itself, both structurally and in terms of content, is always ideological. Language, for Bakhtin, is also always material. According to him, one should always examine how people use language—how language as a material practice is always constituted by and through subjects. Bakhtin considers any form of language—speech or writing—as always a dialogue. The subaltern oral autobiographical narratives as such venturing to thwart hegemonic equations of language do not attempt to make linear, fixed meanings. But their metamorphoses into the representational language of
Malayalam and then to English are part of the effort to make language stable, unitary, and determinant. This is an appropriation. This is an attempt to make the language of the subaltern, monologic as opposed to heteroglossic.

The autobiographical narratives of Janu and Jameela, both oral and in their transliterated versions are heteroglossic. Heteroglossia pertains to the idea of multiplicity of language versions all in operation in a culture. Heteroglossia might be defined as the collection of all the forms of social speech, or rhetorical modes, that people use in the course of their daily lives. Bakhtin calls these socio-ideological languages. According to Bakhtin, there are two forces in operation whenever language is used: centripetal force and centrifugal force. Centripetal force tends to push things toward a central point; centrifugal force tends to push things away from a central point and out in all directions. Bakhtin says that monologic language, monologia, operates according to centripetal force: the speaker of monologic language is trying to push all the elements of language, all of its various rhetorical modes into one single form or utterance, coming from one central point. The centripetal force of monologia is trying to get rid of differences among languages, or rhetorical modes, in order to present one unified language. Monologia is a system of norms, of one standard language.

Heteroglossia, on the other hand, tends to move language toward multiplicity by including a wide variety of different ways of speaking, different rhetorical strategies and vocabularies. Language is rich, unpredictable and
dynamic. Bakhtin stresses how heteroglossia can vitalize and empower a narrative:

The word, dedicated towards its object enters a dialogically agitated and tension filled environment of alien word, value judgements and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile.

(1981: 276)

Both heteroglossia and monologia, both the centrifugal and centripetal forces of language, as Bakhtin observes, are always at work in any utterance: "Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear" (1981:272) Translation is an act of homogenization. It is an attempt to make language monologic. It is an attempt to annihilate the centrifugal forces and compel the heteroglossic text to conform. The attempt to translate *Mother Forest* and *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* which are essentially heteroglossic in form is a reductionist attempt which frustrate the effort at resistance.

The narrative voice in C.K Janu's *Mother Forest* in its oral and transliterated versions is always in the plural. She uses the subject position of *nammal* to articulate her views. This is an extension of her strategy of scripting a communal voice. The sentiments expressed, the viewpoints
explicated are not individualistic, but she is the voice of her community. The text is a communally articulated resistance text. The plurality of the narrative voice is one major measure providing the narrative with power and potentiality. However, the English translation, in tune with the grammatical principles of the language, uses “I” and “We” interchangeably as the situation demands. This is not as simple a case of “sacrificing accuracy for clarity” as the translator notes in his introduction (x). It is a conscious or unconscious act of appropriating the command of a resistance text. By replacing “we” with “I” the silent sobs and fiery protests of many get annihilated. The multi-dimensional aura of the text is reduced to a homogenous single dimension, which the act of translation necessarily entails.

Translation entails a process of cultural de-coding, re-coding and en-coding. Culture expresses its idiosyncrasies in a way that is “culture-bound”: through cultural words, proverbs and idiomatic expressions, the origin and use of which are intrinsically and uniquely bound to the culture concerned. One language cannot express the meanings of another. There is a distinction between the meanings built in and the meanings that must be captured and expressed. In this sense, different languages predispose their speaker to think differently, that is, direct their attention to different aspects of the environment.

Cultural meanings are intricately woven into the texture of the language. The creative writer's ability to capture and project them is of primary importance. One of the main goals of literary translation is to initiate the target-language reader into the sensibilities of the source-language culture.
The process of transmitting cultural elements through literary translation is a complicated and vital task. Culture is a complex collection of experiences which condition daily life; it includes history, social structure, religion, traditional customs and everyday usage. This is difficult to comprehend completely. The subaltern culture, especially the tribal culture with its deep and complex cultural moorings, resists easy comprehension. The tribal autobiography being a cultural specimen fails in its purpose, if the intimate rhythms of its culture with all its intricate nuances are not translated.

Translation is a problem not only of merely finding verbal equivalents but also of interpreting a text encoded in one semiotic system with the help of another. The notion of “intertextuality” as formulated by the semiotician Julia Kristeva is extremely significant in this regard. She points out that any signifying system or practice already consists of other modes of cultural signification (1984:59-60). A literary text would implicate not only other verbal texts but also other modes of signification like food, fashion, local medicinal systems, metaphysical systems, traditional and conventional narratives like myths, literary texts, legends as well as literary conventions like genres, literary devices, and other symbolic structures. The elements of the text which are specific to the culture and the language would be untranslatable. It also brings into focus the important question of cultural identity. It is ultimately impossible to translate one cultural identity into another. The act of translation is intimately related to the question of cultural identity and cultural difference.
There are certain culture specific problems of equivalence in translating an Indian language into English. These problems do occur in the translations of *Mother Forest* and *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* too. In the Indian culture, people show respect to their elders by addressing them in plural. A simple he/she cannot be substituted because then the idea behind the use of plural address would be lost. So, in addressing an elder person, either choice-retaining the plural form or replacing it by a simple "you" or “her”- will lead to ambiguity and fail in articulating the warmth of respect and the relationship inherent in the usage. A specific instance of this occurs in the very first paragraph of Nalini Jameela’s autobiography where she describes with nostalgia her very first recollection - of her *achamma* crawling on all fours trying to cuddle the screaming baby. *Achamma* is referred to as *avaru* in Malayalam, a note of respect to the aged written into it, which is replaced by a simplistic “her” in English. Such instances abound in both the autobiographies.

Regarding social relationships, most Indians used to live with their extended families which calls for the need to address each relative specifically. For this reason, there are different words in all Indian languages to refer to each relation. There are words to address a wife's mother or father, a wife's sister or brother, a husband's sister or brother, a mother's sister or brother, and so on. This concept of extended family living together is unheard of in Western countries; therefore, the English language lacks the corresponding terms. This either results in using terms like “Father’s mother” (Jameela, 2007: 1) for *achamma*, a word which lacks the tenderness of the relationship with all its connotations or resorting to explanations as in “*Valyamma* – my father’s older
brother’s wife” (Jameela, 2007: 2) which reads tedious. The extended-family life style keeps many family values alive. The linguistic manifestations of these values cannot be translated into a language where the audience is unfamiliar with these values.

Kerala society is a rigid caste based society and Malayalam language has terms for each subdivision of one’s caste and class. The caste name is rather an index to the person’s life and livelihood. These are neglected in the English translation of Nalini Jameela’s text. For instance, the Malayalam version speaks about how Jameela, after being out of school, used to go merrily till the pappadam making pandaran’s house. This when translated to English is simply the pappadam maker’s house. The term pandaran which is a culture specific, caste specific word, with all the corresponding significations attached, is neglected which in turn is a manifestation of appropriation.

Regarding food habits, the very flavour behind a food or its significance is untranslatable to an audience who has never heard of it. For instance, certain items of food are prepared only during certain festivals, and such dishes remind Indian readers of the season or some religious story. But this is not experienced by an audience of a different culture. For the tribals thina, thaal, chakka, kanji and fruits like karappayam, mothangappayam, kanjippayam are not just food or fruits but have some poignant associative values. They are part of their memory and culture, they are extensions of their way of life. Though given in italics and explained in an extensive glossary, the feelings and sentiments behind the words can never be fully comprehended or translated.
Dress code or ornaments used and the symbols behind each of them also pose a problem for a translator. The ornaments used by the tribal society are extensions of their harmonious existence with nature. The ornaments are made from nature and each has a symbolic or associative value. Customs and tradition are part of a culture. Be it a marriage or a funeral, be it a festival or some vows, the story and the significance or hidden symbolism behind it become a stumbling block for the translator. The tribal ritual of gaddiga is a case in point. It is a ritual associated with death and is very specific to the tribal culture. The feel and the spirit behind these culture specific rituals cannot be communicated through explanations in the glossary. Similar is the case with religious elements, myths, legends, and the like which are part and parcel of one’s culture.

Words like tharavadu which are so much more than just a “well known and respected family” (Jameela, 2007:4) resists easy translations. The sense of largeness, close knit relationships, pomp and prosperity associated with the word tharavadu cannot be translated as such into “well known and respected family.” Likewise, kindi is not just “water jug” (Jameela, 2007: 3) and thindu (Jameela,2007: 3)not just seating arrangements. Similar is the case with the typical Malayali expression “ayyo ayyo.” Jameela narrates the incident of how, as a child, she used to make a commotion on seeing her school on her way back from shop. In Malayam this is expressed typically as “ayyo ayyo ennu paranju karayum” (14). This is translated into English as “I would howl and bowl and make a big commotion” (2). The phrase “ayyo ayyo” is so much a part of a Malayali’s speech, so much an intimate, powerful and inevitable
element of the Malayali’s expression of pain, sorrow and agony that howling and bowling cannot bring to the minds of the reader the pathetic, yet, in this case, humourous picture of a young girl sitting on the road side and crying her heart out. As Talgeri and Verma rightly point out, a word is “essentially a cultural memory in which the historical experience of the society is embedded” (1988: 3). Any morphological unit is inscribed with cultural and historical gravity.

Kerala society is one noted for its patriarchal inscriptions. It is one society where the patriarchal notions of gender behaviour are adhered to with severity. Girls are expected to behave in a particular manner, speak as befitting to their gendered position. Even games are categorized into boys’ games and girls’ games. The process of socialization, which the girl child undergoes in company of other girl children and from the family, conditions her to stick to her gendered persona. These undercurrents of meaning are covertly present in the Malayalam version of Nalini Jameela’s autobiography where she remarks that since she played only with her younger and elder brothers, she too played those games that boys played: “chettanum aniyanum oppamayathinaal ambilleru kalikkunna kalikalannu njan kalichathu”(17). This when translated into English in *The Autobiography of Sex Worker* became: “. . . once I grew as tall as my brothers, I played the games that boys played” (5). It is not because she grew as tall as boys that she played the games that boys played. The patriarchally conditioned Keralite society never allows girls who grew as tall as boys to play boys’ games! Her peculiar freedom was provided by the fact that she had only her brothers, two boys to play with and so she too played the
games that boys played. These patriarchal underpinnings and the associated peep into the ideology of patriarchy at play are ignored in the English translation.

The English translations of the two autobiographies *Mother Forest* and *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* fail on more than one count as they try to capture the silences in an alien tongue. Any attempt to see a gendered text through the patriarchal telescope is bound to fail. The imperialistic mainstream tongue can never capture the kalaidoscopic quality of subcultural identity. Failure to see and represent the paradigmatic elements and associative relationships of the subaltern oral narrative is like losing the very crux of its being. Representing the subaltern woman is an ideological and aesthetic problem that evades easy solutions. It is the shadow that need to be captured; it is the darkness that need to be brought to light; it is the unarticulated that need to be voiced. The translated pieces fail on these accounts.

Englishing the subaltern woman is betraying the cultural, racial and ethnic connotations of her articulation. *Mother Forest* is an attempt to imprison the voice of the native/tribal woman within a racial and patriarchal framework that the original wants to subvert. *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* is an attempt to thwart the resistance to stigmatization and censure that suffocate and stifle a group of people. Both are voices of the gendered subaltermes desperately trying to carve a meaning and value to their existence. Articulation is like life breath for them. It reflects their desperate attempt to regain at least the semblance of decency. It is an attempt to prove at least to themselves that they
too deserve to be treated as human beings, with the undeniable right to live life on their own terms. Consciousness of the periphery cannot be comprehended by the glance of the centre which is consciously or unconsciously conditioned by power relations and hegemonic values. Any such attempt would only lead to a stifling of the subaltern voice.

The translated texts *Mother Forest* and *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* are rather marketable commodities. Translating the subaltern woman is paramount to bringing her before the mainstream glance. It is a process of dragging her into the consumerist equations of profit and loss. Oral culture is producer-oriented whereas print culture is consumer oriented. *Mother Forest* rather tries to exoticize the ethnic. The text with its very illustrations and artificial techniques which fail to capture the authentic rhythm of native speech looks much like an attempt to muesimize the tribal culture. Nalini Jameela’s text in its anglicized patriarchal robe extends the equations of dominance and subjugation. The autobiographies of these subaltern women are made just shelf pieces for the eye of the centre to look at and comment. They just become paraded pieces of the market. It is a commodification of culture that is practiced. By objectifying the subjectivity of the texts they are made to fall into the same trap, the same grooves that the texts try to evade. The texts do not provide an empathetic view but a sensitive reader rather finds an objective glance. It is the condescending glance so typical of the centre. It is Janu’s and Jameela’s life as seen through the eyes of politically and ideologically conditioned culture. Jameela’s text however looks a little better compared to
Janu on that count, though it too raises disturbing questions of condescending mechanics of ideology playing around.

Any attempt to bring the subaltern women’s articulation into the rigid contours of graphic and linguistic parameters is paramount to the strategy of age-old repression of their expression. Bringing the subaltern text within the four walls of theory is a measure of objectifying and dehumanizing them. Translating the subaltern woman suppresses her attempts at emancipation and resistance. It is bringing the subaltern text within the clutches of subversive forces and hierarchical coordinates. What can be done is a preservation of the oral text as such. An unadulterated, unedited oral narrative as it flows from the tongue of the subaltern woman will safeguard the interests and motives of the articulating authority. Only such a text can represent the illiterate subaltern in all her essence. Janu’s and Jameela’s autobiographies are indeed resistance texts, a bold outflows of anger, protest, sensitivity and a sincere yearning to bring positive changes to their communities’ lot. But these communally articulated cultural constructs achieve their authenticity only when they are preserved in their original form, without being sieved through the perforated consciousness of mainstream society. Only such an attempt can do any service to the attempt of the voiceless to voice herself. Only such a measure can provide the gendered subaltern a platform to articulate the silence of the centuries.
Conclusion

Mediating Resistance and the Self

The earlier critical tradition believed in universalisms, in pure, absolute definitions and solid concepts the contours and boundaries of which could be defined accurately. But the present critical scenario finds that there is nothing absolute, nothing pure, nothing that is single dimensional and easily definable. Everything is fluid and flexible, changing forms and hues, attaining divergent magnitudes and multi facets. Feminism, postmodernism, poststructuralism, deconstruction, Cultural Studies and so on have changed the aura of the critical and aesthetic considerations that one is led to see beyond the visible, to think beyond the apparent. The depth and mystery that lurk beyond the peripheral need be located. These critical tenets offer powerful tools to analyse a text so as to bring the multidimensionality of the text to the forefront.

C.K Janu’s autobiography, Mother Forest: The Unfinished Story of C.K Janu and Nalini Jameela’s autobiography The Autobiography of a Sex Worker are two texts that offer immense possibilities of analysis at multiple levels. The narrative authority of these two texts occupies a distinctive space imprinted with oppression in its most heinous forms. The two autobiographies are constructs of subaltern consciousness. Being a subaltern and a woman is a lethal combination, one that offers minimal possibilities for self-realisation. But it is this minimal possibility that the two texts attempt to actualise.
In the process of narrating their life-stories, they thwart many a preconceived notions and frameworks of patriarchy. The very construct called “woman” is interrogated in the texts, especially, in *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker*. The text questions and challenges the patriarchal constructs of sexuality and sex workers.

Female, subalternity and Otherness are constructs created in culture according to the political aims of the society’s dominant class. There is nothing natural or genuine about these marginalizing concepts. They are deliberate inscriptions created and forcefully imprinted in the collective psyche of the society by the ones occupying the centre - the dominant, the superior, the elite. The centre invariably creates, through the process of cultural Othering, Others, the marginalized, the oppressed. These bifurcations and binary oppositions are not natural or given. They are constructed. They are culturally and ideologically created spaces. In this context, Teresa de Lauretis points out: “there is nothing outside or before culture, no nature that is not always and already enculturated” (1987:21). The existence of the Other nourishes the centrality of the centre. The centre has no meaning without the Other. The dominant society, through different agencies including education, literature, socialization, creates conditions and perpetuates rules that stamp certain class of people as the deviant, the defective and thereby relegate them to the periphery forever: “The rules have little to do with nature and everything to do with culture” (Richter,1998: 12).
Feminism finds “woman” a cultural construct. She is always associated with docility, emotions, chaos, confusion, weakness, passivity and failure as against man, who is rational, dominant, sensible, strong, active and victorious. These notions are powerfully constructed and cunningly perpetuated through media and other cultural apparatus of the dominant that the women themselves internalize these subjugating parameters. She is stereotyped and misrepresented as either the angel, the paragon of all virtues or the demon, the devil incarnate. She is either white or black. The gray areas, the real woman with flesh and blood, emotions and rationality, self and identity is not even reckoned a possibility. She is a puppet playing out the roles of the dutiful and chaste wife, loving, caring and sacrificing mother, or the ever adoring sister or daughter. Authorship is not for her. She does not have a tradition to fall back on. She does not have a language capable of articulating her interiority.

The phallocentric, patriarchal world has appropriated every means of control and expression to itself that the woman, as a self respecting individual finds herself at loss. She has to start from the scratches, to create a world and a niche of her own. Attempts towards these ends have been many. The activities of feminists stressing on consciousness-raising to outright rebellion, the women’s movement have all tried to break the shackles that circumscribe women and create a new horizon for her. But feminism cannot and should not embrace universality. Any such attempt is bound to fail, for the problems of women are culture-specific. It differs from culture to culture, race to race, nation to nation. Every individual is an intersection of different coordinates like class, culture, social positioning, age, colour, caste, sexuality and so on.
Black feminism and lesbian feminism remind one of this variety, the failure to be representative. Texts like *Mother Forest* and *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* extend as well as challenge the premises of Feminism. The texts unveil the gender equations prevalent in mainstream society. *Autobiography of a Sex Worker* in no nonsense terms unveils a clear picture of the double standards of society. Society expects women to be pure, morally upright and sexually docile. Women who attempt to destabilize these equations, like the sex workers, are considered witches, the fallen, the polluted. Even their presence is considered a stigma. The men who are a part and parcel of sex work go unscathed for patriarchy essentially favours men and oppresses women.

Both the texts, *Mother Forest* and *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker*, are bold explications of the hypocrisy and innate hollowness of society. Through the events of their lives, the platforms of social and personal discourses, the texts engage in constant dynamic dialogue with their sociopolitical environment. Autobiography essentially is a medium through which the self is narrativised. The concept of the self moves from the idea of a universalized sovereign self in the Romantic era to one which is decentralized and in process in the postmodern era. It is a problematised space. The self as explicated in autobiography was male and universal in the earlier specimens. Autobiography was written with a religious orientation in St. Augustine’s *Confessions*. This became secular in Rousseau’s *Confessions*. The self as expounded in the earlier autobiographies was essentially male, strong and autonomous. Women appeared in the autobiographical scenario only much later. Subaltern men’s autobiographies differed specifically from mainstream
autobiographies, for they were narratives of pain and aimed at resistance. Even then, the subaltern women were excluded from the subaltern “We.”

The subaltern autobiographies narrated subaltern life and subjectivity from the male point of view. The subaltern woman was silenced and muted even here. The space that a subaltern woman occupies is a cross section of multiple points of marginalization. She is at the receiving end of suppression from different agencies be it class, colour, caste or gender. The attempt of the subaltern women to carve out a narrative of the self itself is a bold feat. This essentially offers a challenge to the mainstream patriarchal ideology of negating the self of a subaltern woman. Writing a self-narrative necessarily involves a substantial amount of self-respect and self-esteem.

*Mother Forest* and *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* are bold attempts by subaltern women to define a self of their own. Construction of the self is imbued with political inputs as far as subaltern self narratives are concerned. “Self” for the subalterns is an intricate space where power play is evident. It is the space where the mainstream society imprints dialectics of subjugation and suppression. Self ironically is made to become the Other. Subaltern women like Janu and Jameela recognize this and their attempt is to evolve a specific voice of subaltern subjectivity. They venture to delineate a strong sense of the self, not as a set of negativities, but with the power of positive performativity. They carve a strong sense of the self in their autobiographies.

Autobiography has always been a potent platform adopted by the subalterns to portray the blaze of resistance. The politics of the subaltern
construction of the self is evident not only in the content that it manifests but also in the form it adopts. *Mother Forest* and *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* necessarily move away from the traditional patterns of full-fledged autobiographies. They are meta-autobiographical narratives attempting to effect a transmutation of the genre called autobiography. They expedite a subaltern reframing and relocating of the performativity of the self. They resist being incorporated into the popular corpus. Being the narratives of subalterns they necessarily are fragmented. They are ruptured or fragmented autobiographies. They are oral constructs transliterated into Malayalam and then translated into English. They challenge the hegemonic form of autobiography by subverting syntactical completeness, non-adhering to rules of grammar, using small letters instead of capital letters at the beginning of sentences, oscillating to and fro between tenses, using present tense to narrate past events and so on. Language is seen as an oppressive regime and the oppressiveness of language is subverted by challenging the rules and order of language. The narrative voice is polyphonic. The texts engage in dialogic discourse between the self and the Other. The language used is carnivalesque. They appropriate language to meet the ideological content of their political discourse. The formal, rhetorical, and discursive dimensions of these subaltern autobiographical narratives posit them not just as literary texts, but also as works of social and political activism. The self-consciousness about language and style as personal statement in the autobiographies testifies to a heightened determination to find ways of breaking out of what each has perceived as the prison house of language.
The autobiographical narratives of C.K Janu and Nalini Jameela are meta-autobiographical narratives. They are explicitly concerned with the process of autobiographical creation. These narratives are explications of the sense of the self of two illiterate or semi literate women. They lack the linguistic resources to overtly deliberate with the authorial process. But a sensitive reader can identify the possibilities offered by the texts to engage dialectically in the process of its construction. The texts meta-autobiographically initiate a response in the readers to find the silenced and the repressed, to find the ideological imperatives of the process of creating the signification “I.” They explore a theory of autobiographical narrative through the practice of creating them.

The essential premises of an autobiography are given a political edge in these autobiographies. The questions of self, subjectivity, authority, representation, narrative, narrative voice, authenticity – the very questions that dictate the contours of the genre are made problematic in the discourse. The texts point to the performativity of the self in writing. The text is a representation in which memory and the self are created out of linguistic performance. The texts meta-autobiographically open the vistas into new discussions and debates regarding its formal and linguistic qualities. They at once become linguistic artefacts and cultural specimens. They turn out to be visual and metaphorical icons.

Unlike the Western autobiographical narratives which essentially are a saga of an individualized self, the autobiographical narratives of these subaltern women are collective constructs. The self that speaks through the
autobiographies does not reflect an individual but a community. In Janu’s narrative there is a constant oscillation between “I” and “We.” As the “We” stands for the tribal community, the narrative becomes the voice of the communal self. Nalini Jameela also induces this sense of communion with the group of sex workers and oppressed women by evoking the collective plural “We.” It is this sense of identification with the group, bound by oppression and the need to survive, that give these autobiographical narratives a powerful political profundity. These subaltern women become cultural ambassadors. The chosen sense of intersubjective communality suggests a strategy of agency, survival, and resistance.

The narratives do not leave behind a sense of dissatisfaction and discontent with the self as other subaltern narratives do, but dare to celebrate their selves with utmost vigour and gusto. These subaltern women’s narratives differ from the subaltern men’s narratives in that they are not mere retrospective scrutiny of the past, but are explicitly engaged in a mission to transform the future. These autobiographical constructs convert the narratives of pain to narratives of resistance.

The life narratives of Janu and Jameela are bold specimens of cultural resistance. Literature is no more a linguistic construct but is a cultural construct. It becomes the space where identity and reality are constructed and negotiated. It is not only a medium of expressing reality but also a platform for constructing reality. Autobiography as a mode of cultural resistance attains poignant dimensions in the case of Mother Forest and The Autobiography of a Sex Worker. The authors are women belonging to the margins of society.
They are the marginalized among the marginalized. *Mother Forest* and *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* are cultural constructs. They articulate the consciousness of communities suppressed and subjugated for centuries. The articulating authority belongs to the margin in more than one way. She occupies a precarious position where a number of restrictive, oppressive forces criss-cross. The first person singular “I” voicing the self is a woman, a community oppressed for ages, a subaltern, economically and educationally disabled and one for whom mere articulation becomes a question of survival.

C.K Janu belongs to the tribal community, a group of people always held to the periphery. They are considered the barbarians, uncultured and uncivilized, unclean and uncouth. They are never given a dignified presence in the mainstream community. Janu’s narrative, however, situates the tribal culture and community in opposition to that of the elite. As the narrative unveils, a serene, autonomous, self-sufficient community comes to the forefront, a community who invariably lives in harmony with nature. They are the children of nature, and nature, forest their doting mother. The life force of the community is its culture, the traditions and rituals. Culture is what binds the community together. The narrative attains the power of resistance when Janu unveils a community living which is rich and colourful in itself: a complete, holistic unit as against its fragmented, uncivilized portrayal by mainstream society.

Culture is a complicated term which evades easy definitions. It is perceived as a whole way of life, as a medium constituted by representation, as a tool of practices, as a matrix of artefacts, as spatial arrangements,
as a paradigm of power, as a qualifier and so on. Apart from the stereotyped definitions of culture that circumscribe it, culture attains its true value when seen as survival. This is what culture is for communities like the tribals whose very existence is inextricably intertwined with their culture and practices.

The mainstream civilized society is always interested in perpetuating the hegemonic equations of power and dominance. They adopt every available means to ensure the subordination of the marginalized classes so that they can remain in the pedestal of superiority and command. Ideology is used as a tool to effect this. Ideology of the dominant class is instilled into the mental landscape of the society through multiple means including literature and education. Ideology becomes an oppressive measure.

The identity of any community, especially of a minority community like the tribals, is embedded in their specificity and difference. It is the very root of their existence. It is this very specificity that the mainstream society tries to obliterate so as to erase their concrete, proud existence. Homogenization becomes a powerful strategy inscribing marginalization. Whenever such attempts at obliterating one’s culture are in action, counter forces of resistance have also come into play. C.K Janu’s *Mother Forest* is a powerful instance of such a cultural resistance.

*Mother Forest* is a resistance text. It is a communally articulated resistance text. The text resists easy categorizations. The text is a bold outflow of anger and protest against forces that try to cut at the very roots of tribal existence. It is a powerful expression of resistance at the elite mainstream society who covertly and overtly intrudes into the peaceful tribal communal
existence. The civilized society intrudes into the pristine tribal set up in many forms, sometimes in the name of development and sometimes projecting the tribals as the deviants. *Mother Forest*, in transparent terms, expounds the attempts of the mainstream society to marginalize the tribal community.

Landscape is a self-referential interiority for the tribals, especially the tribal woman. It is not an object but a subjective correlative of their identity. The tribals have no existence outside their environment. The culture and life, the history, tradition and existence of the tribals are closely entwined with their environment. The mainstream society’s attempts to rob the tribals of their landscape is paramount to the strategy of obliterating their presence. The intrusion of the civilized society into the tribal landscape results in deterioration of the community in many ways. The community who once toiled on their land and made a respectful living of their own is reduced to wage labourers, mere animals of labour with only poverty and humiliation as the bonus.

The migrants, the shopkeepers, the party people - everyone who came into the tribal environment-, in one way or other exploited them and added to their subordination and marginalisation. Their land was robbed from them, with that the means of livelihood. The migrants robbed the land from the tribal men by giving them arrack. Most of the tribals sold off the land which was life itself for them for meager amount of money or a piece of clothing or arrack. The so called elite intrusion including that of the party further created among others, unwed mothers. The tribal children were taken to the towns in the name of tribal development. This only reduced them to misfits, belonging neither wholly to the tribal community nor to the mainstream. They were reduced to mere
good for nothings fated to waste their life in the outskirts of civilized society. The party which came in the pretence of helping them saw them only as their vote banks and marketed their exploitation to gain more votes and power.

*Mother Forest* is a bold articulation of cultural resistance. Janu probes into, explores and unflinchingly presents the exploitation her community suffers at the hands of the civilized society. She also articulates and asks for what it needs to preserve their culture and their existence. The voice that speaks is not meek and submissive but bold and specific, for it is the collective unconscious of her community that speaks through her text.

Nalini Jameela’s *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* speaks for women, subjugated, silenced and hated for centuries. She voices the concerns of sex workers, a presence stigmatized with moral and ethical coordinates. The space occupied by the sex worker is in fact even more problematic than the tribal woman, for the very question of a sex worker drags an additional coordinate of morality into the scene. She is seen as the wicked temptress who wields her body and sexuality to endanger the morality of the whole society. She is an Other not only of man but also the abhorrent/aberrant Other of the Malayali female ideal.

Nalini Jameela’s autobiography offers resistance to the way sex workers are perceived. She demands the status of a profession to sex work and the sex workers must be treated like any other professionals. The resistance power of her narrative is evident in the way she refuses to cringe in shame and hatred before the mainstream authorities but demands respect and due dignity. Her voice stands out in the morally taut Kerala society. She defies being identified
with feminists, for the concerns of a sex worker are beyond the usual concerns of feminism. She creates a subject position which is unique. In addition to man/woman, she carves out and exposes new binary opposites like elite woman/poor laboring woman, tribal woman/subaltern sex worker, feminist/sex worker. Sexuality is seen as an extension of culture and as such sexual commodification is cultural commodification.

*The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* challenges the dominant female ideal. Nalini Jameela subverts the cultural construction of a “prostitute.” She writes in an elaborate domestic into her narrative. She reclaims spaces and subjectivities deemed absent from the life of a sex worker. She presents herself and her community as essential human beings with all emotions, concerns, frailties, desires, capabilities common to womanhood. She challenges the prostitute stereotype. The narrative blurs the demarcations between the life of a sex worker and the laboring poor women. Exploitation of women is ubiquitous in all facets of social and personal life. She posits the antipatriarchal stance by challenging the notion of prostitute as a body. She refuses to be a mere body but claims and demands to be its owner. She is not just a sexual object but a subject on her own right.

*The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* is a bold piece of cultural resistance. The text speaks the firm language of resistance. The narrative recognizes and criticizes the dominant ideological apparatus of society that aids in the perpetuation of hegemony. The innate hollowness and ideological conspiracy of the institutions like police, media are brought to the forefront. The development and rehabilitation projects are criticized for the element of
hypocrisy involved. Nalini Jameela becomes the spokesperson of “Jwalamukhi”, an organization of sex workers and demand the rights of sex workers. She resists attempts to relegate the sex workers to the margins and boldly demands for the sex worker a space and voice of her own.

*Mother Forest* and *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* posit the resistance of subaltern women against the dehumanizing, restrictive parameters of their lives. The self that is constructed through the autobiographical narratives is uncompromising, assertive, bold and strong subaltern self. The fiery strength of the self as embodied in the narratives derives from the experience of pain and subjugation of centuries, the fire of resilience and protest, the unbending drive not to yield, the urgent necessity to survive. However, the elements of resistance and the bold conception of the self in the autobiographical narratives of C.K Janu and Nalini Jameela raises questions regarding the factors of mediation and appropriation. The texts being subaltern narratives frame a new network of significations which require attention. The texts are oral constructs of illiterate subaltern women. These oral constructs are then transliterated into Malayalam by people belonging to different socio-cultural spaces. The transliterated pieces are then translated into English, the colonial tongue, by yet other set of people with diverse cultural, social and ethical conditioning. This raises issues of mediation and appropriation, problems capable of engulfing the very rationale of the narratives.

For autobiography to have the positive performative allowances of self construction, the narrator should be the one taking up the responsibility for the narration. Autobiography necessarily posits the engagement of the self as the
narrator and the self as the protagonist. But *Mother Forest* and *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* speculate questions regarding the authenticity of articulation. The subjectivities enumerated in the autobiographical narratives are mediated subjectivities. It is not the subaltern women’s self with all its frailties and weakness, strength and power that articulates, but it is the self of the subaltern woman as seen from the third person’s perspective. It is the consciousness of the subaltern psyche as sieved through the mainstream filters that comes to focus. This is an appropriating measure of grave consequences since the text necessarily tries to carve out a sense of subaltern essence. The essence and life force of a subaltern text are in its gaps and fissures, in the unspoken sobs and silences. These paradigmatic associations are lost in the process of mediation and appropriation involved.

The texts, the outflow from the subaltern psyche, are oral constructs. They adhere to the conventions and the dynamics of orality. This authenticity embodied by orality is thwarted in the process of graphocentricising the phonic texts. Graphocentricisation drags the texts into a whole new array of significations. It makes the text a site of struggle, in which the self of the narrator necessarily suffers. The preconventionalized self perpetually struggles with the formalizing effects of written narrative. Graphocentricising the phonocentric text is an act of mediation. It negates the authority of the articulating self.

The texts embody its resistance not only in the content but also in the form it adorns. In collaborated autobiographies the narrator may exercise control on the content to some extent, but the narrative form becomes the
exclusive prerogative of the writer, especially if the narrator is a semiliterate subaltern. Narrative form itself operates as an independent signifier; it necessarily encodes, perhaps embodies, and ultimately transmits cultural presuppositions and ideological biases capable of creating or redirecting meaning for the text as a whole. The mediation is evident in the way that the translated piece fails to adhere to the oscillation between “I”/”We” in *Mother Forest* or in the adherence to the tense rules in *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker*. There is an attempt to replace the additive with the methodical, the discursive with the linear, creating a narrative structure which will construct and allocate broader symbolic meaning. The drive of narrative form and literary convention seek to reconceptualize the subaltern subjects. The acts of mediation impede the element of resistance and the attempt to construct an autonomous subaltern self.

Language is essentially phallocentric. It has the capacity not only to represent reality but negotiate reality. It can construct, deconstruct or reconstruct the realities of self and resistance embodied in the texts. The phonic text is vibrant with the typical nuances of the subaltern speech. The conversion of the freedom of oral language to the conventionality of written language displaces the resistance offered in the text. The female subaltern reality, the frameworks of oppression and pain cannot be adequately felt, imbibed and expressed in the phallocentric language. Translating the oral autobiographies of subaltern women to English language amounts to an act of crucial mediation. It is an act of homogenization which depoliticizes the political content of the
subaltern autobiographical narratives. It is the process of imprinting new
dictums of ideology and supremacy on the subaltern topography.

Translation is not a neutral act. It is a deeply political one. It is imbued
with hierarchical equations. It forms a site where power play and constructs of
superiority come into sharp focus. It creates and perpetuates the binary
opposites of Self/ Other, centre/margin. It is a medium to transmit the ideology
of the dominant class. It involves a politics that inscribe inferiority on minority
culture and ensure cultural Othering.

The autobiographical constructs of C.K Janu and Nalini Jameela
definitely portray the spark of resistance. But whether the English translation
*Mother Forest* and *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* have been able to
capture and ignite that spark is a debatable issue. The politics of translation that
comes into play thwarts the very essence of the resistance text. Translating the
text into English is a process of phallagocentricising it. The final products
*Mother Forest* and *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* are twice removed
from the essence, the authority, the centre of articulation. What is produced is a
phallagocentricised construct which fails to capture the specific nuances and
contours of subaltern experience. The silences, the paradigmatic relations, the
absences which form the life soul of a subaltern text remain as mere shadow
evading the glance of the writer, the translator and consequently the reader. The
real deception of the text is “its most subtle one- its pretense that the means of
its production escaped the cultural imperialism the text condemns”
(Bergland,1994: 92). Rather than becoming an authentic articulation of
subaltern identity in all its vivacity and poignancy, it is a mutilated piece sieved
through the filters of mainstream consciousness. The texts in fact offer a subaltern voice that is translated, transcribed, edited, polished, interpreted and thoroughly mediated. Only an unadulterated, unedited, oral, phonic version of the narrative as it is breathed out from the consciousness of the subaltern community can capture the soul of their experience and resistance.

*Mother Forest* and *The Autobiography of a Sex Worker* narrate journeys of trauma and recovery moved by a cathartic necessity to speak out; to voice experiences that have been named as "the unspeakable;" to interrupt an imposed silence about dislocated, discarded, or redundant lives and selves, an existence that has always been considered doomed. These autobiographical narratives attempt to speak out the cultural and ethical hegemony that has led them, and many others in like situations, to mental breakdown, inferiority complex, closeted darkness, and feelings of exile, guilt and Otherness. These autobiographies articulate the necessity to recompose the fractured sense of the self through the registration of their sense of difference. As resistance texts, they are exemplary initiatives toward the formulation of a set of alternative and counter-hegemonic discourses. But these dictated, collaborative, translated autobiographies call for a need to interrogate the mediations and appropriations involved. They necessitate the need for new critical and reading strategies capable of exploring the multiple facets of their origin and existence, strategies capable of excavating the complexities and intricacies involved while at the same time unveiling their power and significance as resistance texts.