CHAPTER IV

Translation as Interpretation:
Ādhā Lekhā Dastābej (An Unfinished Autobiography)

From the discussion in the previous chapter it is comprehensible that in
psychoanalysis transference is marked by fear of possession by the past and loss of
control over both it and oneself. Transference in translation is also always stalked by
the shadow of the 'original'. Although translated texts are considered and read as
'original' in many instances (we can take the example of Orhan Pamuk's novels).
Translated texts are also looked at through suspicious eyes which have been discussed
with ample examples in the previous chapter. However, transference in
psychoanalysis and transference in translation is preceded by the act of interpretation.
By means of interpretation an analyst makes the unconscious conscious. By means of
interpretation a translator creates the source text in the target language. Whether it is
Freud's dream wish, religion or transference -- everything is the result of Freud's will
to interpret and his interpretation. Similarly, a translated text is the result of a process
of comprehension and interpretation in the translator's mind. This chapter will deal
with the idea of interpretation and its relation to translation. The chapter is divided
into two parts. The first part is a theoretical discussion on the ideas of translation and
interpretation. The second part deals with the practical issues involved in the
interpretative act of translation.

4.1

Etymologically the word translation means to carry across. In a simple sense
translation is the transmittal of a written text from one language into another. The text
to be translated is called the source text, and the language it is to be translated into is
called the target language. The final product is called the target text. Different critics define translation in their own ways. As Horace defines:

A theme that is familiar can be made your own property so long as you do not waste your time on a hackneyed treatment; nor should you try to render your original word for word like a slavish translator, or in imitating another writer plunge yourself into difficulties from which shame, or the rules you have laid down for yourself, prevent you from extricating yourself. (28)

Horace is proposing here a technique where the translator takes some amount of liberty in producing the translated text. The question of loyalty in translation complicates the matter which stresses the importance of the accountability of the translator. As Chesterman puts it: “A translator should act in such a way that the demands of loyalty are appropriately met with regard to the original writer, the commissioner of the translation, the translator himself or herself, the prospective readership and any other relevant parties” (68). This idea contests the approach forwarded by Toury and others who rejected the traditional source-text oriented systems. Taking into account the variations in contexts Gideon Toury opines:

Multiplicity and variation should not be taken to imply that there is no such thing as norms active in translation. They only mean that real-life situations tend to be complex; and this complexity had better be noted rather than ignored, if one is to draw any justifiable conclusions. As already argued, the only viable way out seems to be to contextualize every phenomenon, every item, every text, every act, on the way to allotting the different norms themselves their appropriate position and valence. (212)

Hence the question of liberty and loyalty in translation is an issue of debate throughout the ages. Katha, for instance, took up certain radical policies in translating regional texts to English. The aim is to catch the heterogeneity of India. Katha Vilasam, the Story Research and Resource Centre, was started in 1989 with the
agenda to bring the best of Indian writing from as many as 21 languages into English. Over the last eighteen years Katha published writings that foster communication and cultural exchange between Indian people, languages and cultures, across history, across caste, class and religion. Katha initiated a trend that caught on and became the basis for seamless translations without providing glosses, for instance.

Another critic Octavio Paz defines translation in the following manner: “Translation is very difficult- no less difficult than writing so-called original texts- but it is not impossible” (156). This means translation is a negotiation between two languages, two cultures and sometimes between two nations. This is also a kind of exchange in which both the sides are enhanced in terms of socio-cultural material. As Bassnett says translation is “a complex set of systems existing in a dialectical relationship with other sets outside its boundaries” (2002:80). The world views reflected in each have opened up spaces of knowledge for each other which may not have been found in their isolation.

Lawrence Venuti in an essay entitled “Translation as Cultural Politics” compares translation with metalanguage. He says, “…a metalanguage, a second-order discourse that takes a prior signifying system as its object, is found to be reductive and exclusionary and thus likened to terrorism, violent action that is both intense and damaging, that intimidates and coerces, usually in the service of social interests and political agendas, often under the aegis of reason or truth” (2010: 67). Venuti’s point is the act of translation is not innocent of the socio-cultural environment. Racial hierarchies, ethnic violence, economic condition, terrorism, and war everything figures in translation. Venuti makes it more clear elaborating the idea further as he says:
The violence of translation resides in its very purpose and activity: the reconstitution of the foreign text in accordance with values, beliefs and representations that pre-exist it in the target language, always configured in hierarchies of dominance and marginality, always determining the production, circulation and reception of texts. Translation is the forcible replacement of the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text with a text that will be intelligible to the target-language reader. This difference can never be entirely removed, of course, but it necessarily suffers a reduction and exclusion of possibilities — and an exorbitant gain of other possibilities specific to the translating language. Whatever difference the translation conveys is now imprinted by the target-language culture, assimilated to its positions of intelligibility, its canons and taboos, its codes and ideologies. The aim of translation is to bring back a cultural other as the same, the recognizable, even the familiar; and this aim always risks a wholesale domestication of the foreign text, often in highly self-conscious projects, where translation serves an imperialist appropriation of foreign cultures for domestic agendas, cultural, economic, political. (2010: 68)

Venuti makes the point that the tendency to domesticate might not result in a translation which works as an act of establishing communicative equivalence between two languages. The quotation also brings to light that the act of translation gets affected by the market trends in the receiving culture which becomes a kind of reductionism. If a book is a product of a socio-cultural milieu, then it also has socio-cultural purpose. In this perspective the act of translation becomes relevant. Translation is the medium of cultural interaction between two language groups.

This aspect finds adequate importance in the work of Susan Bassnett. Bassnett in her *Translation Studies* discusses translation as a “process of decoding and recoding” (16) and refers to Eugene Nida’s model of the translation process. The process illustrates the stages involved in translation in this way: analysis, transfer and restructuring. The first step in this process is analysis. The translator has to read,
analyse, come to an interpretation\(^1\) of the source text on the basis of the analysis and then restructure it in the target language. The translator is a reader first and then an interpreter. The thesis of this chapter is to reveal that the act of translation is always already an act of interpretation.

Interpretation is basically assignment of meaning to signs and symbols. The history of interpretation in Western thought dates back to the interpretation of the Bible. Biblical hermeneutics\(^2\) is the result of the attempt to establish the meaning of the Word of God. The modern self-consciousness about the problem of textual meaning is exhibited by Schleiermacher at the beginning of the nineteenth century and by Dilthey towards the later part of the nineteenth century. They stressed the importance of being fully aware of the actual historical context of production of a text in order to understand it. Their goal was to develop a method, which, by enhancing such awareness, would allow for interpreting a text in light of its original context, avoiding misunderstandings and distortions to recover its objective meaning. Dilthey emphasizes the need for a historical synthesis in the following manner:

Man, this temporal creature, maintains the security of his existence, as long as he works in time, by lifting his creations out of the temporal flux as enduring objects. While under this illusion he creates with greater joy and power. Herein lies the eternal contradiction between creative minds and the historical consciousness. The former naturally try to forget the past and to ignore the better in the future. But the latter lives in the synthesis of all times, and it perceives in all individual creation the accompanying relativity and transience. This contradiction is the silently born affliction most characteristic of philosophy today. (Linge: 550)

Schleiermacher, on the other hand, believes that meaning is constructed out of a dialectical interaction between the part and the whole and gives importance to the
contexts of the author. He says: "The art (of interpretation) can develop its rules out of a positive formula, and this is: the historical and divinatory, objective and subjective reconstructing of a given utterance" (Palmer: 89). Later on Hiedegger and Gadamer oppose this stance. They are of the view that human mind is not an empty receptacle. It is not a ‘tabula rasa’, devoid of conceptual categories, values and prejudices. Gadamer says in his *Truth and Method*: “an understanding inevitably involves some prejudices” (239). An interpreter can never approach a text blank; the early experiences will definitely play a role. Gadamer further elaborates:

The overcoming of prejudices - the wholesale demand of the Enlightenment - will itself turn out to be a prejudice, whose revision alone will clear the way for an appropriate understanding of the finitude which not only dominates our humanity but just as much our historical consciousness. Does standing in traditions actually mean first of all being subject to prejudices and limited in one's freedom? Rather, is not all human existence - even the most free - limited and conditioned in many ways? If that is the case, the idea of an absolute reason is simply not a possibility for historical humanity. Reason for us is only real as historical, that is, without reservation, it is not itself lord but always remains dependent upon the given in which it participates. (260)

Gadamer emphasizes the productive role of interpretation and anticipates the ideas postulated by reader-response theory as he says, “The meaning of a text goes beyond its author not just sometimes but always. Understanding is not a reproductive but always a productive activity” (280). Interpretation to Gadamer is an ongoing process: “...the winning of the true sense contained in a text or artistic work never comes to an end. It is an infinite process” (282).

With the theoretical turn in literary studies the idea of interpretation too evolved. The New Critics endowing the text an autotelic status restricted literary interpretation to the artistic devices which are responsible for the totality of the
literary work. Accepting the importance of the aesthetic devices, T.S. Eliot also values the importance of the past: "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone: you must set him for contrast and comparison among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not historical criticism" (4-5). In a broad sense Eliot was anticipating the notion of intertextuality and the intertext itself as the more aesthetically valid form of writing from a context and to an audience. The idea of interpretation got more importance with the development of the reception theory, a European phenomenon with the German scholars such as Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser taking the lead. Iser in his *The Act of Reading* describes reading as "interaction between the textual signal and the reader's act of comprehension" (9). Iser says the literary text provides the reader with a set of schematized and incomplete instructions. The blanks in the text must be completed by the reader, based upon personal experiences but constrained by the instructions provided by the reading selection. The reader combines the textual information with prior experience to produce meaning. The text creates a "horizon of expectations" (112). These expectations are not completely fulfilled. The surprise and suspense generated by the unfulfilled anticipation encourages the reader to continue the journey through the text. Iser calls this an 'implied reader' (34). Iser also says while an implied reader follows the authorial intentions perfectly as it is created by the author, actual readers cannot view the world exactly from the perspectives as a text intends. The question is again taken up by Stanley Fish in the reader-response theory, an Anglo-American phenomenon which was influenced and eventually created by Structuralist and Poststructuralist ideas. Fish introduces the concept of
"informed reader" (1970: 134) for total reading experience. An informed reader is an efficient speaker of the language out of which the text is built up and possesses a comprehensive semantic knowledge of the language which is an essential criterion of mature reader. In other words s/he possesses knowledge of the language both as a producer and a comprehender. In Is There a Text in This Class? he clarifies: "[T]he reader of whose responses I speak is complex, an informed reader, neither an abstraction nor an actual living reader, but a hybrid - a real reader (me) who does everything within his power to make himself informed including suppressing [...] what is personal and idiosyncratic and 1970ish in my response" (49). This is how the key theorists conceptualize reader and the reading experiences.

Another theorist Michel Foucault in his “About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self” like Derrida, Heidegger, and Nietzsche conceives of the subject as an atomized, ahistorical individual. Foucault (like Derrida) situates himself at the end of philosophy because he considers that the tradition that begun with Plato had exhausted itself and is no longer valid. It is interesting to think of one’s work not as a beginning at the end, but rather as a continuation of a long philosophical tradition. Foucault is of the opinion that the best way to enrich our understanding of the subject is to keep in mind the facts of history and our evolution. To keep in mind that we are all situated in history.

Coming back to our attempt to undertake the exercise of establishing the act of translation as interpretation we can quote Gadamer. In his Philosophical Hermeneutics Gadamer says:

...the hermeneutically enlightened consciousness seems to me to establish a higher truth in that it draws itself into its own reflection. Its truth, namely, is
that of translation. It is higher because it allows the foreign to become one’s own, not by destroying it critically or reproducing it uncritically, but by explicating it within one’s own horizons with one’s own concepts and thus giving it new validity. Translation allows what is foreign and what is one’s own to merge in a new form by defending the point of the other even if it be opposed to one’s view. (94)

This statement of Gadamer beautifully captures the interpretive act involved in translation. It involves an attempt to retain the writer’s intent and a conscious withdrawal of translators’ selves. The same thing has been echoed by the interpretive approach to translation represented by the Paris School. Interpreting in translation is based on the appropriation of meaning, followed by reformulation in the target language. Translators reconstruct the meaning of the source text and convey it to the readers of the translation. They go one step further than interpreters as Danica Seleskovitch says by attempting to “equate the expression of sense, to certain extent, with the linguistic meanings of the source language” (32). In this way she shows translation as a dynamic process of comprehension and re-expression of ideas. Here the non-verbal stage of conceptualization is stressed. The Paris School discovered the similarities between translation and interpretation in the fact that both the translator and interpreter have to play the role of speaker and listener. Addressing the question of implied readers in translated text Theo Hermans says that this is where the voice of the translator’s too intrudes into the discourse:

It is therefore not surprising to find that it is precisely with respect to the cultural embedding of texts, e.g. in the form of historical or topical references and allusions, that the Translator’s Voice often directly and openly intrudes into the discourse to provide information deemed necessary to safeguard adequate communication with the new audience. As a rule, translations, and certainly modern translations of canonical literary fiction, stop short of
reorienting the discourse so radically that the orientation to the original
Implied Reader disappears altogether. The translated text can therefore be
said to address a dual audience, and thus to have a 'secondary' Implied
Reader superimposed on the original one. (2010: 199)

In this way a translated text is seen from perspectives of reading and interpreting.
Derrida, on the other hand, questions the authenticity of written texts and
interpretations. Gentzler’s elaboration of Deconstruction makes many things clear
which is also of importance for understanding Poststructuralist translation theories:

In contrast to all the theories discussed in this study, at the foundation of
Derrida’s thought is the assumption that there is no kernel or deep structure
or invariant of comparison, nothing that we may ever discern -- let alone
represent, translate, or found a theory on. Rather, Derrida “bases” his
“theory” of deconstruction on non-identity, non-presence, on
unrepresentability. What does exist, according to Derrida, are different chains
of signification – including the “original” and its translations in a symbiotic
relationship – mutually supplementing each other, defining and redefining a
phantasm of sameness, which never has existed nor will exist as something
fixed, graspable, known, or understood. This phantasm, produced by a desire
for some essence or unity, represses the possibility that whatever may be
there is always in motion, in flux, “at play”, escaping in the very process of
trying to define it, talk about it, or make it present. The subject of translation
theory has traditionally involved some aspect of determinable meaning that
can be transferred to another system of signification. Deconstruction
questions such a definition of translation and uses the practice of translation
to demonstrate the instability of its own theoretical framework.
Deconstruction resists systems of categorization that separate “source” text
from “target” text or “language” from “meaning”, denies the existence of
underlying forms independent of language, and questions theoretical
assumptions that presume originary beings, in whatever shape or form. In
translation, what is visible is language referring not to things, but to language
itself. Thus the chain of signification is one of infinite regress- the translated
text becomes a translation of another earlier translation and translated words,
although viewed by deconstructions as "material" signifiers, represent
nothing but other words representing nothing but still other words
representing. (147)

This is how Derrida deconstructs the binary between 'original' and translated text and
finds the notion of translation at work in every discourse.

In Indian tradition too ancient scholars made some interesting divisions among
the different types of translation. In that period translation was done between some
allied languages like Sanskrit and Prakrit. These translations were called 'chaya
chaya' or 'translation as shadow of the original text'. This theory has three
implications as Gopinathan describes: “1. A translation should follow the original text
exactly like a shadow, which follows the original object. 2. As a shadow can differ
from its original object, depending on the intensity and the angle of light falling on it,
a translation may also have a different form depending on the nature of light thrown
on it by the translator by his interpretation” (1-2). It shows the importance given to the
interpretation of the translator. Sri Aurobindo, an Indian English writer and an Indian
philosopher with deep Indian classical philosophical insights talks about comparative
perspectives in the following manner: “Once we understand the essential things, enter
into the characteristic way and spirit, are able to interpret the form and execution from
that inner centre, we can then see how it looks in the light of other standpoints, in the
light of the comparative mind” (Sewak and Singh, eds.: 113). Stressing the
importance of grasping the inner centre Aurobindo finds three stages in the analysis,
comprehension and finding equivalence in the target language of a translated text.
They are name (nama), form of meaning (rupa) and the image of the essential figure
of truth (svarupa) (Gopinathan: 8). Gopinathan further explains Aurobindo’s
psychological explanation of the levels of understanding in the following way:
Here, Sri Aurobindo indicates the different levels of consciousness and the role of intuition in grasping the meaning at the higher levels. He is mentioning three levels of the text, which are like the three levels of language mentioned by the fifth century philosopher-grammarian Bhartrhari, in his work *Vakyapadiyam*, namely *pasyanti*, the highest or the deepest level of consciousness, *madhyama* or the intermediate common mental level and *vaikhari*, the spoken linguistic level. (8)

So the Indian theorist is looking for a higher level of understanding which only seeks to guarantee that better communication will be possible through translation. Certain Indian critics are applying classical Indian poetic theories like ‘Dhvani’ (suggestive meaning) and ‘Auchitya’ (appropriateness) as critical yardsticks of translation. Avadesh K. Singh explains Auchitya in translation:

> Auchitya in translation, without moving too far from its meaning in Indian poetics, should mean propriety in selection of a text for translation, of methodology and strategy used for translation, and of placing the translated text in proper perspective, so that the source writer’s/ text’s intended, not merely articulated, meaning finds its proper expression in the target translation. The prime purpose of translation is frustrated and even defeated when the foundation of translation is laid on textual torture, and translation, instead of placing source writer’s creative vision or misrepresents it. (xi)

In classical Western translation theory too there had been a debate on sense for sense and word for word translation.

In Indian theory of semantics Bhartrhari anticipated many of Derrida’s ideas on word and meaning. The relationship between signifier and signified for which Derrida coined the term *differance* is marked by a difference between the signifier and signified and a deferral of the signified. Harold Coward discovers the affinities and says, “This insight of Derrida's is nicely paralleled by Bhartrhari's view that the dynamic of separation into word (sabda) and meaning (artha) is beginninglessly
present in language at all its levels from the uttered or fully sequenced speech (vaikhari vak) to the apparently unitative intuition (pasyanti vak), in which sequencing is present only as a pregnant force” (8). For Derrida too, différance or articulation originates in the experience of space and time (1997: 65). Bhatrhari discussed both the phonetic and semantic realization of language. He provided both the material and transcendental view of language. A remarkable example is his Sphota theory. G.N. Devy elaborates the idea referring to a śloka in Bhatrhari’s Vakyapadiya:

Nadasya Karmatatvanna purvo na parasca sah,
Akramah kramarupena bhedavaniva jayate.
Pratibimbam yathanyatra sthitam toyakriyavasat,
Tatpravrittimivanveti sa dharma sphotanadayoh.
Atmarupam yatha jnane sreyarupasca drsyate,
Artharupam tatha sabde svarupasca prakasate. (147)

He provides the translation of the verses in the following manner:

Since the phonetic manifestation is sequential, language expresses itself in a sequentially graded body, though in itself it is without a sequence in terms of a ‘pre’ and a ‘post’ existence. The relation between nada (phonetic manifestation) and sphota (semantic realization) is like that between the reflection of something in flowing water and the stream, a reflection which is of a steady object but which acquires the movements of the stream. As knowledge reflects its own nature as well as the nature of the giver of that knowledge, so do phonetic signs reflect their own forms as well as the forms of significance. (147)

Unlike Derrida Bhatrhari does not talk about the loss of the origin, but believes in the soul of a word. He says no meaning is possible unless there is ‘sphota’ which holds the meaning. Bhatrhari’s theory can provide a different take off point for constructing
a different theory of translation. However, this Indian theorist did not talk about the conveyance of meaning in the transference from one language to another.

Coming back to the actual act of translation, K. Chellappan in his essay "The Paradox of Transcreation" calls the act of translation an imitation of an archetypal language and archetypal text. The original itself is a translation of the archetype⁴. He says, "...the different possible translations, like the different interpretations postulate to an archetypal text as well as an archetypal language towards which all translations point, and the translator becomes a co-creator of the text because his target is the secret order signified by the text" (163). The act of translation, then, is an imitation of an imitation. From this point of view there is no origin — hence translation is a moment of the text's history. It is possible that during the process certain aspects of the 'original' may be lost; it is precisely what often happens during translation and what is suggested through the ideas of untranslatability and betrayal.

In the language of the Maya Indians of Yucatan, the priests, whose special duty was to declare the oracles of the gods, are termed chilan, "interpreter"⁵ (literally, "mouth-piece," from chio, "mouth"), - they were the "mouth-pieces" of the deities. The English word interpret comes, through the French ‘interpreter’ and from the Latin ‘interpretari’. Both these words bear the meaning of, "an agent, broker, factor, go-between," perhaps originally "a speaker between." Similarly the translator is such a broker who mediates acquiring a subject position depending on the individual choices.

As Theo Hermans says:

In this view translators do not just redirect pre-existing messages but, giving voice to new texts, they cannot help but intervene in them and, in so doing, establish a subject-position in the discourse they shape. As a result, translation is inevitably coloured by the translator's subjectivity, generating a
complex message in which several speaking voices and perspectives intermingle. The assumption, incidentally, that the translator’s ‘differential voice’ (Folkart’s term) will necessarily have its own timbre and ambience was later vindicated with the help of forensic stylistics: a study analysing a computerized corpus of translations by two different translators found that each left their linguistically idiosyncratic signature on their translations, regardless of the nature of the original text. (2009: 96-97)

Hence a translated text acquires a sort of independent identity with the signature of each individual translator.

However, a translated text is never allowed to achieve that sort of independence as it has a text to follow. It demands some amount of self denial. The content of the text is understood and appropriated; but to create enough space for the thing of the text or in other words in order to let the thing of the text be the translator needs to deny and disappropriate himself/herself to a great extent. Here the act of interpretation itself oscillates between remoteness and proximity and ends up with an act of making the remote close. Dr. VVB Rama Rao calls this act “parakaya pravesha.” He further says, “...this involves not merely parakaya pravesha and self-effacing but speaking in the author’s surrogate voice which it is not easy to achieve” (20). Many of us do not know the translators of the European writers like Kafka, Mann, Sartre and many others. For us they are the ‘original’ writers. In this sense meaning is for a consciousness, consciousness of something toward which it overcomes itself.

Along with it in translation the encounter is also between two cultures and two languages. The task of the translator is to bridge the gap. In other words this act involves the immediate linguistic environment of the utterance and contextual factors like the genre, style, linguistic register, the beliefs, desires and expectations of speaker
and addressee, the communicative norms and knowledge shared by the community etc. In this context, Nietzsche's idea can be relevant. He says, "But philology is not done with anything so easily, she teaches us to read well, that is, slowly, deeply, with care and sympathy, reserving judgments and leaving doors open, reading with delicate fingers and sensitive eyes" (qtd. in Kloepfer & Shaw: 33). The task of translation demands this kind of a reading, in the way directed by the text itself. Nietszchian reading also includes the awareness and knowledge of the various signs which are intralingually and intersemiotically realised in the text.

To understand the intricacy of this task we can refer to certain examples used by certain critics. VVB Rama Rao gives three versions of the same couplet in Tamil language. One translator uses the word virtuous, another uses the word excellence and one does not use any such term. Now this choice depends on their individual interpretation. The interpretation largely depends on their socio-political and cultural background. Alladi Uma explains the experience of translating a short story entitled ‘Dawat’ by Khadeer Babu. They translated it as ‘A Feast’ but the author insisted that they retain the ‘original’ title and give a footnote like this: “Dawat normally refers to any feast. Here it refers specifically to the feast after the nikah (the marriage contract) which the bride’s people are compelled to host, no matter their economic status” (95). As a Muslim writer writing in Telegu, he was attempting to convey the complex status of Muslims in Andhra Pradesh by using certain Urdu words which not only stand out but also suggest their social compulsions. Sometimes the situation may be more intriguing. Hans J Vermeer in an essay uses two terms to focus on a linguistic confusion. He gives the example of German and Indian Nāstā. Indian of our example may call the cup of tea Nāstā. The German Frühstück consists of bread and coffee.
Both are 'cultural equivalent'. The value position of both the behavioural act would be same in both the systems but they are not 'semantic equivalent' (Toury, 1987:29), when a reader reads a translation s/he is not aware of the cultural context of the source language. This may result in ignoring the foreign culture. The second part of the chapter will look into these questions in a more detailed manner.

Translators after all like interpreters speak in someone else’s name and thus they are expected to subscribe to what Brian Harris has called the ‘true interpreter’ norm, or the ‘honest spokesperson’ norm which requires that people who speak on behalf of others “...re-express the original speakers ideas and the manner of expressing them as accurately as possible and without significant omissions, not mix them up with their own ideas and expressions” (118). It would be convenient to make it clear that translation and interpretation have some significant differences. In many cases the translator does not know the author and hardly is in touch with readers; but the interpreter knows the speaker and in many cases the speaker can influence the interpreter. The interpreter has to be more careful because the audience can react immediately to what has been said. A translator gets time to acquire specific knowledge on the subject; but an interpreter has to be prepared in advance as s/he has to perform the act immediately after the ‘original’ speaker’s speech.7

4.2

In this exploration of the technique and telos of translation I intend to make a case study of the actual acts of translation encountered in literatures from my own regional language. For this purpose I have taken up a critically and creatively acclaimed text by the selected writer. The book in question is Mamoni Raisom
Goswami's *Ādhā Lehkā Dastābej* which is translated into English as *An Unfinished Autobiography* by Prafulla Kataky. The autobiography contains three chapters and in the original the writer entitles only the third one, but the translator entitles all three. This is a choice made by the translator on the basis of his interpretation of the text. The autobiography begins in this manner: “Sei samayat bayas bar kam āchil. Khovā pindhār cintā nāchil. Enekuvā abasthāt mor bayasar jikono sovāliye ānandat din katovāre kathā āchil. Mor kapālat kintu ei ānandar kathā lekha nāchil. Ek prakār Noirāshya āru dukhbodhe mor hrdayar logot jen ghar bāndhiye loichil”(1). The translation is:

Those were the days when I was quite young: a mere slip of a girl, with no worries, living in a world of fun and frolic and happy abandon. Any girl, as happily placed, could be expected, naturally, to enjoy herself. But I was not destined to have a mind that remained at ease. A sort of vague fear and anguish somehow seemed to have settled on my heart, even at that tender age. (1)

I translate the same paragraph in this way: “I was young. I was from a well to do family with every comfort one could imagine. Any girl of my age would spend the days in fun and frolic. Yet I was not destined to be happy. My still young mind was steeped in an unknown disappointment and sadness.”

The writer’s attachment to the language and the experience makes the ‘original’ immediately striking for the reader. For a reader who does not have access to the ‘original,’ the translation will speak the experience. The translator will be the surrogate of the writer. It is a challenge for the translators how appealing their translations can be for the readers. In the above translations my translation is shorter than the other translation. I think the short aphoristic sentences can capture the feeling and thought of the writer whereas the other translator makes it a little descriptive or
emotionally oriented. The translator of *An Unfinished Autobiography* is also being faithful to the ‘original’ and has almost made a word for word translation. For instance, the translator translates “mor hrdyar logot jen ghar bândhiye loichil” as “have settled on my heart”. Whereas my translation of the line – “My still young mind was steeped in an unknown disappointment and sadness” stresses the importance of retaining the sense of the source text appropriately. My understanding and interpretation of the act of translation make me prefer a reader friendly translation because to capture the nuance of the beauty of the Assamese language used by Mamoni Raisom Goswami, is nearly an impossible task. In that case a little bit of liberty on the part of the translator will help to maintain coherence of the translated version. Above all it is a matter of individual choice and preferences made by the translators. In this case the interpretations largely depend on the academic background, historical contemporariness and individual understanding of the text by the translators. Similarly, on their way to Kashmir when the writer saw the horned-owl, she said it was ominous. Her husband said, “Tumi śikshita sowāli; ene dharanar kathā nakabā.” The translator writes: “An Enlightened girl like you believing such nonsense!” My interpretation of the line in the original text makes me to prefer a line like this: “Come on! You are an enlightened girl.” Here my translation is also influenced by my reading of the writer's autobiography and her writings on her personal life. The writer always talked about her husband as an amiable person. Considering the nature of her husband I choose the above mentioned line.

Certain parts in the narrative the writer keeps within brackets. In the beginning Goswami describes her attachment with her father:
And yet, I could bear the sight of my father languishing as a victim of cancer — the same person without whom, I was sure, I could not live! How strange! Finally, he disappeared from this mortal scene one day, but I could hardly take my own life for that. In those early days, the terrible thought of self-destruction got rooted firmly in my heart. My soul seemed to contend with such vague thoughts since my childhood. What is worse, I could not bear the constant burden of my soul to anyone. (4)

In the ‘original’ this part is kept within brackets. The writer may have intended to keep it as an aside. This is not retained in the translation. In the first chapter where Goswami describes her daily walk with her sister near Navagraha area the translator keeps the original words ‘pucca’ and ‘kaccha’ to talk about the road. The translator retains the indigenous qualities of the language. Or if we go back to Gadamer the translator merges ‘what is foreign’ and ‘what is one’s own’ and creates a new language out of that. In another instance the writer describes a place near Brahmaputra:

Brahmaputrar sūrjya astar chabi? Pānit pari chatṭatāi thakā firingatibor jen sonālī māch hoi pare... Urvaśī khandahārat thekā khowā bhāgaruwa kiran jen sei prācīn kāpor jikhan kāpor pindho sakalo ātmāi ei prithibīloi āhe, āru eir thi jai. Urvaśī āse pāse bicchurīta hoi parā ei prācīn bastrar rahasyamayī rupar chabīye sei bayasate manar mājat ek rahasyamayī bhāb srstī karichil. Ei pathate sei premiktowe prāśna karichil — Āhā mor lagat sau sūrjya asta cai ahibāl! (16)

The translation is:

The sunset over the mighty Brahmaputra is a unique spectacle of splendour. The sparkling wavelets then look like golden fishes. The weary rays of the retiring sun, lingering upon the rocky bosom of ‘Urvaśī’, counterfeit the shape of that antique yarn which the soul discards after descending here on earth. Its images spread all over Urvaśī aroused in my mind a sense of awe and perplexity which would not be resolved. It was in a moment like this that
the bold lover suggested to me that we sit together and enjoy the rare spectacle of sunset over the Brahmaputra.

The paragraph is well represented by the translator, but the word ‘Urvasī’ may remain a culturally alien term for some readers who are not aware of Hindu mythological connotations of the word. This type of cultural distance which are due to the difference in extralinguistic reality and the linguistic mapping of the reality is called ‘cultural gap’ (Toury, 1987:36). The statement of the lover is presented in the direct speech in the original. The translator makes it indirect. Hence the impact of the ‘original’ cannot be achieved. The same thing happens when the translator translates Māhideu as Mrs. Lekharu (168). The closeness and emotional intimacy of the term ‘māhideu’ cannot be captured through the word Mrs. Lekharu. The issues discussed above are involved in the reading, interpretation and translation of the text. The same text will be translated in different manner by different translators depending on their interpretations.

If we talk about the question of the liberty of the translator in the context of the translated text; the translator has not omitted any part from the ‘original’. Again if we bring in Rao’s concept of ‘parakāyā prabeśa’ the translation seems to have not been very successful in that. This is also true that the author’s tumultuous experiences in life and her felicity in Assamese language make the work incomparable. Moreover, the translator takes certain independent decisions which do bring a difference to the translated text. For instance in the source the writer makes some sections in the first chapter; but the translator does not do that. Several small omissions and changes bring in noteworthy differences between the source and the target text. Narrating the picnic with her family and Madhaben Raisom the writer expresses: “Ki nādi āchil seikhan?
Pārat ekhan cārīkōnīyā cālī āchil. Ei cālikhanar pārā dūroir nādīr sōbhā bārnanātīt āchil. Duyopine āchil atabya aranya. Aranyar chāyā pānīt pari ek ananya gabhāratār sṛsti karichil. Śaśāvar pārā prakṛṭir saite mōr ātmār ananya samparka thakā bābe ei sōbhā cābaloi moi sei cālikhanar talat thīya haichilo” (22). The translation is “We settled on a spot on the bank of the river Umium where there was a sort of improvised shelter of rectangular shape. From under that shelter, the river looked simply marvelous. There were dense forests on both sides of the river. The shadows reflected on the waters gave the impression of unfathomable depth” (17). The poetic narration of the author gets marginalized with a prosaic description in the translation. Again the writer says about Mabhaben, “Seidina moi upalabdhi karilo je āmār sanmukhar gharat thāki ei manuhgarākīye mok jen gabhārbhāve laksya kāri āche” (23). The translator writes: “From his words I knew that I was closely observed by that young man” (18).

Another important feature of the act of translation which has been discussed in the theoretical section is the transfer of cultural information. From that perspective the text abounds in terms of religious and cultural descriptions. In the first chapter itself the writer narrates sacrificial rites made to propitiate the Goddess Bagalā for her marriage accompanied by a description of Kāmākhyāpitha (An Unfinished Autobiography: 14-15). The writer also gives ample information about her ancestral home which brings to light the satra culture. She elaborates on the hunting prowess of her grandfather who also possessed an elephant called Rajendra (An Unfinished Autobiography: 67-69). The writer’s stay in Brndāban and the narration of it offers a real picture of the religio-social picture of the place. So the translation of the text does perform the act of cultural negotiation.
In the first part of the chapter it is pointed out that the readers of the translated text are different from the readers of the source text which is termed ‘secondary Implied Reader’ (2010: 199) by Theo Hermans. Certain changes made by the translator of the selected text appear to have aimed at this ‘secondary Implied Reader’. The writer’s first entry into Brndāban in a tānā makes her nostalgic about the memories of the different attacks on that place by the Muslim leaders. Referring to the attack by Sikandar Lodi the author visualizes how the place was turned into butchers’ shops demolishing the temples: “Bigrahar bhagna khandabor māṁsa ojan karā ‘dagā’ karibaloi ādeś dile. māṁsa ojan karā ‘dagā’?” (123). The translator replicates it with the following sentences: “The broken pieces of the sacred idols were used as weighing measures. What a sacrilege!” (96-97). The readers who do not understand what kind of insults is connoted when idols of Hindu religion made weighing measures for meat can depend on the word ‘sacrilege’ to convey the message. Clearly, from the discussion it can be inferred that interpretation in translation does play a defining role.

Coming to the concluding part of the chapter I would like to refer to a comment made by Pramod Talgeri on the act of translation. He says: “This is the process of displacement of the subject from its tradition of identification, where a conscious attempt is made to experience the difference in identity” (22). This is an unavoidable experience for the reader and the translator in the act of translation. Translators follow certain procedures to diminish this effect. They are like borrowing, definition, literal translation, substitution, lexical creation, omission and addition. All the procedures do not achieve cultural transfer in the sense of filling the gap, but they all serve the purpose of achieving communicative equivalence in translation. At this
point if we reiterate Derrida’s ideas the question of a translated text does not exist. Derrida writes in *Of Grammatology*: “Within the limits of its possibility, or its apparent possibility, translation practices the difference between signified and signifier. But, if this difference is never pure, translation is less so, and a notion of *transformation* must be substituted for the notion of translation; a regulated transformation of one language by another, of one text by another” (Ixxxvii).

Following Derrida it does not matter whether it is the ‘original’ or the translated text, for a meaning can never be captured, it slips. A translation displaces the possibility of grasping that which the ‘original’ text desired to name. Different translated versions of the same work will give different reading experiences to readers. This is because translation is interpretation. Umberto Eco calls a translator ‘Model Reader’ who has to do the interpretation without lapsing into ‘overinterpretation’ (Snell-Homby, 2006:107). The translator here is very much like his ‘Model Reader,’ one selected by the stylistic and other types of coding in the text or, in the case of postmodern literature, one whose reading is already anticipated by, or embedded in the text. The reader not only collaborates with the text but also “activates” it or brings it into existence. The model translator, like the Model Reader, is called to the task of translation by the text’s codes and activates the text in the context of the language into which the translation is made. As the Model Reader thinks and reads like the author – on the ideal level, the reader is none other than the author herself/himself – the model translator, too, is expected to be as close to the ‘original’ author as possible, presupposing a contemporaneous and collaborative relationship between the two (Snell-Hornby, 2006:106-109). The question is how close can the translation be when the translated text is open to multiple interpretations giving rise to an ‘aporia’? So
how does one look for a standard when interpretation is at the core of the directing principles of translation? Or does it make the task more liberating?

Yet the translator does try to render the source in the target language. However, the resources of the language into which the work is to be rendered seldom allow the translator to reproduce this intended effect and it often results in ambiguity or multiple meanings. S/he has to select one out of several simultaneous connotations and thus his/her rendering becomes an interpretation whether s/he likes it or not. Hence translation is a process accompanied by a tendency of the translator reaching for a pencil, to make further additions and subtractions in the pursuit of a perfection which can never be achieved. Perfection may remain a longing in translation in terms of semiotic and semantic equivalence, yet it successfully performs the act of communicative equivalence breaking the barriers of cultures. Translation actually is an act of cultural transference, a moment in which meaning gets modified even as it must be conceded that it is possible to simultaneously lose some of the ‘originary’ meaning of the source text. The following chapter will look into this to understand the relationship between translation and culture.
Endnotes:

1. The term interpretation here refers to the translator's individual understanding of the source text. This understanding is largely moulded by the socio-cultural context of the translator and the translator's linguistic and socio-cultural knowledge of the source text.
2. Hermeneutics refers to the theory of interpretation and the issues, techniques and procedures this process entails.
3. The idea of intertextuality can broadly be defined as the influence of other texts on a text. Many critics such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Julia Kristeva and others deal with the idea in their own ways; but for a clear understanding of the term Roland Barthes’ “Theory of the Text” (1981) can be referred.
4. Archetype is the collective emotional aspect in the unconscious of an individual in a society which remains embedded for centuries. It is a Jungian idea.
5. Interpretation is generally understood where the task of the interpreter is to say the speech of the speaker in the target language.
6. For further elaborative understanding of this idea James A. Parr’s “Don Quixote: Translation and Interpretation” is helpful and interesting.
7. For further information Brian Harris’s “Prolegomenon to a Study of the Difference between Teaching Translation and Teaching Interpretation” can be read.
8. Urvashi is the name of a celestial nymph.
9. Mother’s sister; sometimes used to address elderly ladies to show emotional intimacy.
10. Aporia is a Greek term meaning ‘without an opening’. The term became popular with Derrida’s use of it in Deconstruction to mean ‘no end or resolution’.
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