Chapter IV
TRANSLATING THE LITERARY OTHER

The process of colonization involves the settlement of communities of a country in another, with the former as the centre of their concerns and activities. No land allows itself to be exploited, until and unless the native people conspire against themselves. The colonizing communities try to achieve this end by dominating the new lands politically. They defeat them in war or de-systematize, de-stabilize or even destroy the native institutions—religious, social, educational, administrative, judicial and cultural. In order to sustain and further their activities and validate their presence in the colony, the colonial forces construct a body of knowledge to serve their purposes. This body of knowledge helps to mis-represent and appropriate indigenous systems of knowledge and thereby enables the colonizers to consolidate their territorial occupation by making the position of the colonized intellectually and culturally complex. Colonization has led to a large scale appropriation and exploitation of the geographical territory of Africa and Asia, generally put together as the Orient. Orientalism is a discourse designed to represent the Orient as the Other of the West. It is a body of knowledge that enables the colonizers to domesticate the Orient to erase the cultural identity.

Colonization has influenced the entire humanity both materially and psychologically in manifold ways. It has become a trope standing for exploitation of resources—natural, economic, human and intellectual. The first
is manifested in exploitation of natural resources, like raw materials, western industries, the second in revenue collection, the third in indentured labour and the last in the appropriation of intellectual and cultural resources through the translation of knowledge texts and validated plagiarism of textual artifacts in the name of their preservation. The Orientalists have manipulated the knowledge text of the colonized through translation and appropriated this knowledge for their political ends: to consolidate and prolong their position as rulers of the colonies.

The body of knowledge constructed by the colonizers instilled a sense of inferiority in the colonised. The phrases like “white man’s burden” or “areas of darkness” are part of this project. This body of knowledge about the Orient (the East) by the Occident (the West) comprises literary and non-literary texts is Orientalism. In other words, Orientalism is a textual construct, a body of discursive practices about the Orient by the people from the West. Edward Said, in his “Introduction” to Orientalism, remarks: “The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (1978:1). By producing this knowledge, the European culture has gained in strength and identity by setting it off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self. Orientalism thus projects the image of the West as a liberal patron and a civilizing agent.

This discourse is appropriated by the authority to validate itself as the authoritative version the West’s Other, or the East. In it, the Orient was
depicted as passive, static, unchanging, sensuous and inert. These stereotypes of the Orient have validated the interventions by the West and its continued presence in the East. This is the Occidental way of entering/subverting the natural structures and replacing them, controlling and dominating the Orient/the colonized. The Orientalist translations are also considered part of this ethnographic project. Thus, the East was a career for the West. The knowledge imparted through these writings is essentially political. In this context, Said observes:

It is an elaboration not only of a basic geographical distinction (the world is made up of two unequal halves, Orient and Occident) but also of a whole series of “interests” which, by such means as scholarly discovery, philological reconstruction, psychological analysis, landscape and sociological description, it not only creates but also maintains; it is, rather than expresses, a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is manifestly different or alternative and novel) world; it is, above all, a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political (as with colonial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with reigning sciences like comparative linguistics or anatomy, or any of the modern policy
sciences), power cultural (as with orthodoxies and canons of
taste, text, values), power moral (as with ideas about what “we”
do and what “they” do or understand as “we” do). (1978:12)

So, the nexus of knowledge and power has created the Orientals. It validates
the notion that the two remain in tow and help the rulers to amass wealth and
resources.

In the case of India, the Oriental discourse has a different face with
different motives. The Asiatic Society of Bengal was founded by William
Jones, with the help of Warren Hastings. John Collegians called him “the father
of the literary band”, in his commemorative verse on 15 January 1784.
He developed a spinning mill of the Oriental discourses on the colonies in Asia
in general and India in particular. For Hastings, the promotion of the Oriental/
Indological studies had practical and utilitarian motives, apart from his love
and respect for the people and culture of India. As part of it, he wrote to
Nathaniel Smith, Chairman of the East India Company, in 1784 and
recommending the publication of Charles Wilkins’s translation of
The Bhagavad-Gita. Of the sixteen items enlisted in the manifesto of the
Society, literature was entered at the tenth position as “Poetry, Rhetoric and
Morality of Asia”. Though it was the sixteenth of the prospective concerns,
Jones wanted to open up the Oriental studies to the European mind.

One of Jones’s greatest ambitions was to initiate the West into the vast
literary treasures of the East. His curiosity, more than the ambition to conquer
the Asiatic countries, is vehement in the speech which Jones delivered on February 2, 1786 at the Asiatick Society of Bengal:

Their sources of wealth are still abundant even after so many revolutions and conquests, in their manufactures of cotton they still surpass all the world; and their features have most probably, remained unaltered since the time of Dionysius: nor can we reasonably doubt, how degenerate and abased so ever the Hindus may now appear, that in some early age they were splendid in arts and arms, happy in government, wise in legislation, and eminent in various knowledge, but, since their civil history beyond the middle of the nineteenth century from the present time, is involved in a cloud of fables, we seem to possess only four general media of satisfying our curiosity concerning it, namely, first, their Languages and Letters; secondly, their Philosophy and Religion; thirdly, the actual remains of their old Sculpture and Architecture; and fourthly, the written memorials of their Sciences and Arts. (Jones, 1799: 34)

In fact, he founded the Asiatic Society with a view to showing the East the cultural superiority of the West. Hence, his translation of Kalidasa’s *Shakuntala* as *Sacontala* or *The Fatal Ring* can be considered a revolutionary contribution to Orientalism. The text was seen as a means to
study the geography of the place, and thereby controlling it, in the disguise of refinement:

… we may properly begin with the civil history of the five Asiatick nations, which necessarily comprises their Geography, or a description of the places, where they have acted, and their astronomy, which may enable us to fix with some accuracy the time of their actions: we shall thence be led to the history of such other animals, of such minerals, and of such vegetables, as they may be supposed to have found in their several migrations and settlements, and shall end with the uses to which they have applied, or may apply, the rich assemblage of natural substances.

(1799:145)

The European sensibility was greatly moved by the aesthetic and erotic enchantment of the hero in the drama, King Dushyanta, (Dushmanta), by the beauty of Shakuntala (Sacontala), the daughter of the Brahman sage, Viswamitra, and a heavenly courtesan, Menaka.

Jones heard about the genre of nataka, and he thought it was a kind of history, but Pandit Radhakanta clarified the meaning as being similar to the plays performed by the English in the cool season in Calcutta. When he asked to suggest a nataka, he referred to Kalidasa’s Abhijnanasakuntalam. Jones was enthused on reading it and he decided to translate it. He saw it as demonstrating the high qualities of Indian civilization. He considered it all the more remarkable as it was written at a time “…when Britons were as unlettered and
unpolished as the army of Hanumat…” (Mukherjee, 1987: 105). Jones’s interest in the Eastern drama is well expressed in the “Preface” to his work *Sacontala*:

In the north of India there are many books, called Natac, which, as the Brahmens assert, contain a large portion of ancient history without any mixture of fable;” and having an eager desire to know the real state of this empire before the conquest of it by the Savages of the North, I was very solicitous, on my arrival in Bengal, to procure access to those books, either by the help of translations, if they had been translated, or by learning the language in which they were originally composed, and which I had yet a stronger inducement to learn from its connection with the administration of Justice to the Hindus; but when I was able to converse with the Brahmens, they assured me that the Natacs were not histories, and abounded with fables; that they were extremely popular works, and consisted of conversations in prose and verse, held before ancient Rajas in their publick assemblies, on an infinite variety of subjects, and in various dialects of India:… (1875: i)

Jones’s reason for selecting Kalidasa *Shakuntala* is also shown in the “Preface”:

Resolving at my leisure to read the best of them, I asked which of their Natacs was most universally esteemed; and he answered
without hesitation, *Sacontala*, supporting his opinion, as usual among the Pundits, by a couplet to this effect:…, assisted by my teacher Ramalochan, began with translating it verbally into Latin, which bears so great a resemblance to Sanscrit, that it is more convenient than any modern language for a scrupulous interlineary version:… (1875: ii)

His selection has of course helped him to use the translation strategy of domestication.

Bharata’s *Natyasastras* is considered the earliest known treatise on Sanskrit dramaturgy. It deals with the evolution of drama. It is said that gods, under the leadership of Indra, expressed their desire for some sort of *drishya* (enjoyable by the eye), *shravya* (delightful to the ear), and, *kridanaka* (entertainment to fulfil the desire). To fulfil these needs, Brahma created a fifth Veda called *Natyaveda*, taking the elements from four Vedas- *Pathya* (dialogue or text) from *Rigveda*, *Gita* (music) from *Samaveda*, *Abhinaya* (acting) from *Yajurveda*, and, *Rasa* (emotions) from *Atharvaveda*. The characteristic features of Sanskrit drama are: (1) absence of tragedy,( 2) interchange of lyrical stanzas with prose dialogue, (3) use of Sanskrit language by the heroes, kings, Brahmans and men of high ranks,( 4) use of Prakrit language by women and men of lower classes, and, (5) it begins with a prologue, which opens with a prayer to Nandi and ends with Bharata- vakya. Great dramatists like Bhasa, Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, Shudrak and Vishakhadatta have used these techniques to highlight the quality of their works.
Kalidasa has been unanimously acclaimed as the greatest Sanskrit poet of India. He enjoys a high rank among global poets like Dante, Goethe, and Shakespeare. Kalidasa has to his credit seven classics: two lyric poems: *Ritusamhara* and *Meghaduta*; two Mahakavyas: *Kumarasambhavam* and *Raghuvamsham*; three plays: *Malavikagnimitram, Vikramorvashiyam* and *Abhijnanashakuntalam*. Since he was well-versed in various systems of Philosophy, Law and Polity, Economics, Dramaturgy, Erotics, Music and Fine arts, Zoology and Plant science, he could make his work a true representative of India and Indian culture.

Kalidasa’s *Abhijnanashakuntalam*, is a court drama meant to be performed before a selected audience (urban nagarakas) on a special occasion. The play was moulded in the tradition of a romantic comedy, where the sport of the kings was articulated in hunting and romantic love. The locale of the Sakuntala episode is confined to an *ashram* in the foothills of Himalaya. The story of Sakuntala is related at length in the *Mahabharata*, where it occurs as one of the ancestral legends of the Puru lineage in the *Adi parvam* (the book of the beginning) where it is told as the *Sakuntalopakhyana*. The narrative of Sakuntala is told by Vaisampayana to Janamejaya, who in turn narrates it in the course of reciting the epic on the occasion of a major sacrificial ritual. Even though Kalidasa adopted the theme from the epic, he filled it with subplots involving a curse and a signet ring. For making the episode into a heroic drama of a romantic tradition, he used the theme of subplots from the *Itihasa-purana*.
Eventhough Kalidasa’ *Shakuntalam* externally appears to be a love story, it faithfully portrays the extremely sensuous, colorful and concrete imagery growing out of the Hindu tradition. The concepts of Indian values, womanhood, ascetic life, astrological knowledge formed some of the areas which fascinated the Europeans. So, they generalized through the drama, the first glimpse of India, an exotic, largely unknown world that needed the help of Europeans to shape them. In this context, Said remarks:

> To rule and to learn them, to compare Orient with Occident, these were Jones’ goals, which, with an irresistible impulse always to codify, to subdue the infinite variety of the Orient to a complete digest of laws, figures, customs and works, he is believed to have achieved. (1978:178)

Jones attempt was to document and codify the details of the Orient into an official record. He found it necessary to study the Orient to control the Orient. The British covered this agenda so wisely, as Lord Salisbury explains:

> When you have got a faithful ally who is bent on meddling in a country in which you are deeply interested- you have three courses open to you. You may renounce- or monopolize- or share. Renouncing would have been to place the French across our road to India. Monopolizing would have been very near the risk of war. So we resolved to share. (Said, 1978:41)

Sharing the systems of knowledge especially the knowledge of Economy, Polity and Law of the Country is advantageous to the colonizers.
These systems help the colonizers to rule the colonized by their laws modified to the advantage of the colonizers.

Kalidasa’s hero and heroine exemplify the qualities mentioned in the Natyasastra. Sakuntala is portrayed as a typical Indian woman, while Dushayanta is caricatured as a man of court. For instance, even when Dushyanta is not able to recognize Sakuntala, he is bewitched by the nature of her womanliness.

Mayyeva vismarana daruna cittavrittau
Vrittam raha pranayamapratipadyamane. (Act V, 23)

…She looks indignant; her eyes glow; and her speech, formed of harsh terms, faulters as she utters them. (Act V: 63)

Similarly when a disciple of the hermitage obstructs the king from hunting a black antelope, he readily accepts the words showing his greatness as a king.

Ashramayogayam na handavyo, na handavyah
Tat sadhu kritisandhanam pratisamhara sayakam
Artatranaya vah sastram na prahartumanagasi. (Act I, 11)

Slay not, O mighty sovereign, slay not a poor fawn, who has found a place of refuge. No surely, no; he must not be hurt. An arrow in the delicate body of the deer is would be like fire in a bale of cotton….The weapons of you kings and warriors are destined for the relief of the oppressed, not for the destruction of the guiltless.

(Act I: 4)
The play highlights the concept of *dharmasastras*:

Susrusasva gurun, kuru priyasakhivrittim sapatnijane
Patyurvprakstapi rosanataya masma pratipamgama
Bhuyistham bhava daksina parijane bhagyesvanutsekini
Yantyevam grhinipadam yuvatayo vamah kulasyadhayah.

(Act IV, 18).

Here, Kanva speaks eloquently on the duties of noble wives:

When thou art settled in the mansion of thy husband, show due reverence to him and those whom he reveres: though he have other wives, be rather an affectionate handmaid to them than a rival.---- Should he displease thee, let no thy resentment lead the to disobedience.----In thy conduct to thy domestics be rigidly just and impartial; and seek not eagerly thy own gratifications.---By such behaviour young women become respectable; but perverse wives are the bane of a family.

(Act IV, 52)

In Kanva, we see the anxiety of a father towards the wellbeing of his daughter. Kanva’s heart is touched with sadness, as he has to part with Sakuntala. He worries that if a disciplined ascetic like him suffers so deeply from love, how a father can bear the pain of each daughter’s parting:

Yasyatyadya sakuntaleti hrdayam samsprstamutkanthaya
Kanthah stambhitabaspavrttikalusah unta, jadam darsanam
Vaiklabyam mama tavadidrsamaho snehadaranaukasah

Pidyante grhinah katham nu tanayavislesa dukhair navaih.
(Act IV, 6)

My speech is interrupted by a torrent of tears, which my reason suppresses and turns inward: my very sight is dimmed. ---- Strange that the affliction of a forester, retired from the haunts of men, should be so excessive! ---- Oh, with what pangs must they who are father of families, be afflicted on the departure of a daughter! (Act IV, 48)

The Brahmanical high culture that prevailed in that period is seen reflected in Kalidasa’s works. The words spoken by Saradwata and Sarangarava are instances for this; they talk about the absolute power of husband over his wife, and find it her duty as well as her happiness to bear even slavery at her husband’s house:

Tadesa bhavatah kanta, tyaja vainam grhana va

Upapanna hi daresu, prabhuta sarvatomukhi. (Act V, 26)

Sacontala is by law thy wife, whether thou desert or acknowledge her; and the dominion of a husband is absolute. (Act V, 64)

Atha tu vetsi sucivratumatmanah

Patikule tava dasyamapi ksamam. (Act V, 27)

But if thou knowest the purity of thy own soul, it will become thee to wait as a handmaid in the mansion of thy lord. (Act V, 65)
In short, Kalidasa’s play highlights the Hindu culture and customs, amusements, prejudices, and daily occupations that mirrored the period.

William Jones’s translation retains the form of the play, but it has been refashioned to suit the western intentions. One of his objectives was to educate Europe about India. It was an Orientalist design to rediscover the Indian past for the Indians through the gaze of European scholarship. The scheme was not only to make the emergent middle class Indian aware of this culture but also to imprint on his mind the interpretation given to it by the Orientalist strategy of control. In this regard, Monier-Williams states:

…a literal translation… might have commended itself to Oriental students, but would not have given a true idea of the beauty of India’s most cherished drama to general readers, whose minds are cast in a European mould and who require a translator to clothe Oriental ideas, as far as practicable, in a dress comfortable to European canons of taste…. (1898: vi)

He goes on to explain:

….The English student at least, is bound by considerations of duty, as well as curiosity to make himself acquainted with a subject which elucidates and explains the conditions of the millions of Hindus who owe allegiance to his own sovereign, and are governed by English laws…. (1898: vii)

Thus, controlling the culture of the colonized is a form of inventing a new way of perceiving and using that culture.
Indian cultural values were new to the West. This made them think of the East as the cultural contestant for the West. The East came to be characterized as having an identity alien to the West. Hence all the great thoughts of Kalidasa were transported to give a feel of the Indian mystique. Whereas Kalidasa’s heroine was a “child of nature”, Jones transformed her to a “rustic girl”:

Patum na prathamam vyavasyati jalam yusasvapitesuya
Nadatte priyamandanapi bhavatam snehena ya pallavam
Adye vah kusumaprasutisamaye yasyah bhavatyatsavah
Seyam yati sakuntala patigraham sarvairanujnayatam. (Act IV, 9)
…she who drank not, though thirst, before you were watered; she who cropped not, through for you, one of your fresh leaves, though she would have been pleased with such an ornament for her locks; she whose chief delight was in the season when your branches are spangled with flowers. (Act IV, 49)

In changing the innate nature of Shakuntala, Jones indeed proved his inability to grasp the sensuality of the whole scenario. He was eager to portray her as a true Indian based on her looks. In his Third Anniversary Discourse delivered on February 2, 1786, Jones remarked about the Orient in defamiliarised terms:

A people, says he, presented themselves to mine eyes, clothed in linen garments somewhat low descending, of a gesture and garb, as I may say, maidenly and well nigh effeminate, of a
countenance shy and somewhat estranged, yet smiling out a
glozed and bashful familiarity. (1799:31-32)

For the Westerner, Sakuntala represented the fairy tale atmosphere of the child-
like Indian. She was the “feminine east” without a voice. Her typical Indian
womanhood that continues to love Dushyanta even when he abandons her, is
incomprehensible to the West. They regard her act to infer that she is an easily
malleable object. Hence Sakuntala’s simplicity became one of the discursive
domains within which the colonized can be safely contained. Like her, the
Asiatic countries were always modest in their dealings with the West. This
made the Orientalist assess the Orient as eternal, uniform and incapable of
defining itself.

As Sakuntala is made to represent the East, Dushyanta is portrayed as
the West. His hunt at one level is an onslaught on nature, but it is also
suggestive of a surrogate battle in which territorial claims can be established.
His penetration into the gentle calmness of the hermitage reminds of the
territorializing act of the colonizer.

Avasaroyatmatmanam darsayitum na bhedavyam

(ityardhokte) athava rajabhavastvabhijnato bhavet

Bhavatu evam tavadabhidasye.( Act I , 12)

This is a good occasion for me to discover myself….my royal
caracter will thus abruptly be known to them. No; I will appear
as a simple stranger, and claim the duties of hospitality. (Act I: 10)
In Indian perspective, Dushyanta breaks a rule of conservation ecology: hunting is prohibited inside a hermitage. He is an intruder who destroyed the serenity and tranquility of the hermitage. As a representative of the colonial power, he wants to colonize the land as well as the female body. The Western interest in penetrating the space of the East is strong in the lines spoken by Dushyanta:

Gacchali purah sariram
Dhavati pascadasamstutam cetah
Cinamsukamiva ketoh
Prativatam niyamanasya. (Act I, 32)

I cannot, in truth, divert my mind from the sweet occupation of gazing on her…? My body moves onward; but my restless heart runs back to her; like a light flag borne on a staff against the wind, and fluttering in an opposite direction. (Act I: 16)

William Jones was well aware of the duty he was doing for the West: adapting the play to suit the aesthetic sense of the West. He unconsciously made every attempt to make Dushyanta stand for the colonizer.

In *The Prologue* Jones admitted that “we must do justice to a new production of Calidas, a dramatic piece, entitled Sacontala, or The Fatal Ring” (1875:1) Since Sanskrit verses have rigid and definite metrical forms, complex patterns of assonance and alliteration, and distinct qualities of rhythm, Jones might have found it difficult to understand the Eastern sensuousness.
This difficulty might have forced to call the translation as transliteration. He admitted this limitation in his “Preface”:

I then turned it word for word into English, and afterwards, without adding or suppressing any material sentence, disengaged from the stiffness of a foreign idiom, and prepared the faithful translation of the Indian drama, which I now present to the publick as a most pleasing and authentick picture of old Hindu manners, and one of the greatest curiosities that the literature of Asia has yet brought to light. (1875: ii)

Even while he made an apology in the “Preface,” he actually made the language speak for the Westerners. He purposefully took the liberty to include the names of flora and fauna to make the landscape appear ordinary and universal. As the names were unknown to the Western world, they showed the Otherness of the Indian land. This construction of the Otherness helped him to contrast his self image.

There is considerable qualitative impoverishment in Jones’s translation of Shakuntalam. For instance, many of the erotic passages, which formed part of the Indian romantic tradition, were rendered merely verbal excesses in translation. In Act I, Dushyanta, like any other lover, is greatly annoyed by the bee’s attack on Sakuntala. At the same time, he feels envious of the bee that has got the opportunity to be close to her and touch her lips. It has got the rare luck to enjoy her sensous beauty:

Calapangam drstah sprsasi bahuso vepathumatim

Rahasyakhyayiva svanasi mrdu karnantikacarah
Jones translated the passage in such a rhetorical way that it lost the *rasa* which could have been generated had he realized its importance in the Indian context. Thus, Jones’s translation certainly led to the loss of the original richness and variety. But he transformed it to suit the European taste. Politically, he attempted to set the Indians, The Orient, against the “rich West.”

William Jones’ translation of *Shakuntalam* shows the West’s attraction to the glamour of the exotic. Like other Orientalists, he found that encountering the East was significant for the self-image of the West producing identities ranging from decadent European modernity to the concepts of cultural, racial and moral superiority. The most important political turn he gave to his work is the personification of Sakuntala as the Orient and Dushyanta as the Occident. He cunningly portrayed the very feminine Sakuntala as an Oriental woman unlimitedly sensual, lacking in rationality and, most importantly, willing to be seduced. Like her, the Orient was seen as the weak and inferior partner. The Oriental needed the Orientalist to be animated. Thus, the feminine Orient has waited for European penetration and insemination by colonization.
While retaining the structure of the drama, Jones was well aware of his mission of restructuring the Orient through the strategy of control. As he was preoccupied in this objective, he failed to portray the essence of the true work. The breath of life showing Indian values in Kalidasa’s *Shakuntalam* was translated as highly erotic one, practised only by savage minds. Thus, he pointed out indirectly that these tribes needed polished hands to refine them.

The Persian classic, *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam of Naishapur*, was made known to the Western world through its English translation by Edward Fitzgerald. The poem, failed to sell a single copy when it was first published in 1859. But, after Fitzgerald’s death in 1883, the poem became so popular that one would find it on the shelves of people who knew no other poetry. To the literary world, *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* means only the one particular translation done divinely well, especially when the Victorian age was at its most self-centered and self-sufficient stage of development.

*Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, was published anonymously, as a pamphlet in paper covers. The British Museum received its copy on 30 March, the day before Fitzgerald’s fiftieth birthday. As per the details on the cover, there were 250 copies, and the price of the book was 1 shilling. Bernard Quaritch, a publisher specialized in antiquarian and oriental books and manuscripts published the translation. In an 1899 catalogue, Quaritch noted that the sale fell absolutely dead at the published prize of 1 shilling. The book rose to sudden fame, when it was discovered by two young Irishmen, Whitley Stokes and John Ormsby, both practicing as barristers in London; having acquaintance with the
member of the Pre-Raphaelite circle, they brought a copy for Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Rossetti in turn, showed the poem to Swinburne, and thus the book had risen to the sinfully extravagant sum of two pence. Rossetti and Swinburne began distributing the poem to friends and literary associates like Browning, Meredith, Morris, Ruskin and Tennyson. After that different versions of the poem occurred, keeping in mind the demands of the audience. Thus, *The Rubaiyat*, changed from an eccentric and individual enterprise to a commercial “property.”

*The Rubaiyat* was in tune with the Zeitgeist, as it showed affinity with Omar Khayyam as well as the translator, Fitzgerald. In this regard, Charles Eliot Norton observed: “…the prevailing traits of the genius of Omar Khayyam are so coincident with certain characteristics of the spiritual temper of our own generation, that it is hardly surprising that his poetry, of which hitherto the Western would knew nothing, is beginning to excite the interest it deserves’, but he later acknowledges that some of these ‘traits’ have been ‘re-enforced by the English [translation]’, and that every now and then a note of the nineteenth century seems to mingle its tone with those of the twelfth”(xxiv). Norton meant that there was temperamental affinity between the original writer and the translator. Moreover, the characteristic trends of the ages separated by seven centuries were strikingly similar.

The poem *The Rubaiyat* is attributed to Omar ibn Ibrahim al-Khayyam, who was born in 1048 and died in 1131. The first allusion to him as a poet was found in a treatise of 1176-7; where verses in Arabic were attributed to him.
But, only in the following century, he began to be identified as a composer of *The Rubaiyat*. It is said that the political, religious and cultural confrontation following the decay of the central authority of the Abbasid Caliphae in Baghdad, had prompted him to create such verses. Omar lived during the reign of the Saljuq Turks, which coincided with the early Middle Ages in Europe. In Persian history, the “Saljuq Period” denotes the period from 1037 to 1231. In 1037, Toghrul (the founder of the Saljuq Dynasty) seized Nishápûr (birthplace and burial place of Omar Khayyám). He proclaimed himself the sultan or *malik* at Marv (North West of Iran). In 1231, the Mongols ransacked the country and took it over from the Saljuq Turks. The invasion of the Turks in the early eleventh century brought about major changes in the political and religious structures of the country. This marked the beginning a period of turmoil. During this period Iranians had to witness and endure the rule of nomadic Turks from the central Asian steppes and south-eastern Russia. These unbelievers had embraced Islam with great fervour in order to enjoy, live in, and finally rule an Islamic country. It was a time when deceit and hypocrisy spread widely and freedom of thought was very restricted. The Turks had found their greatest source of power in religion. In this regard, Ali Dashti, a Persian critic and scholar of European literature, observed: “…they drew the practitioners of the Holy Law into their service and, in consequence, jurists, traditionalists, and preachers flourished while philosophy, logic, and other rational sciences became daily more suspect and feared” (1965:49). Saljuq period was marked by strong religious prejudice against the local sects and in
the discrepancies of opinion. This consequently led to clashes, massacres, and the burning of religious buildings.

The Saljuqs belonged to the orthodox Sunni branch of Islam to which the Caliph also belonged. So they took severe measures against Shiism. Before the invasion of the Turks, different sects of Islam and even people from different religions worked together, even in the court. The king never cared about religious discrepancies. In Omar’s time, the Saljuqs became more religiously zealous than the Persians. Sunnis believed that the Baghdad Caliphs were the rightful successors of the Prophet. The Shi’ was denied the legitimacy of Caliphate and the Saljuqs believed that the family of the house of the Prophet and their descendants, starting from Imam Ali, were the rightful successors. On account of these conflicts in Omar’s time no one was safe and no one could express his ideas freely. A century before, one could discuss philosophical and scientific ideas quite openly. But, when the Turks came to power the situation changed. In the introduction to his Arabic text, *Algebra*, Omar Khayyám remarked:

> We are the victims of an age when men of science are discredited, and only a few remain who are capable of engaging in scientific research. Our philosophers spend all their time in mixing true with false and are interested in nothing but outward show; such little learning they have, they expend on material ends. When they see a man sincere and unremitting in his search for the truth, one who will have nothing to do with falsehood,
they mock and despise him. However, we take refuge
in God! (quoted in A. Dashti, 1965:89)

This important passage gives a vivid picture of Omar’s time. Men of science
were discredited and philosophers were interested only in “outward show.”
Omar had nothing to do with such falsehood. He was a “man sincere and
unremitting in his search for the truth,” even if he was mocked at and despised.

The title *The Rubaiyat* refers to the form used in the poem. A *rubaiyat* is
a collection of four line verse, often known as quatrains in English. Each verse
is a *rubai* (meaning four in Arabian and Persian languages), and *rubaiyat* is the
plural of *rubai*. In Persian literature, a quatrain or *rubai* is generally accepted as
complete in itself. It is a form of epigram expressing a thought or idea.
The metre used in its English version is iambic pentameter and the rhyme
scheme is AABA. Such a verse form later came to be called as *Rubaiyat*
quatrains, which was used by popular poets like Robert Frost in his poem
*Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening*.

Edward Fitzgerald, a Victorian translator, came to know about this
Persian work, through his intimate friend, Edward Byles Cowell, a young
Oriental scholar who became the Professor of Cambridge. He discovered the
*The Rubaiyat* or Quatrains of Omar Khayyam in a Persian manuscript in the
Bodelian library at Oxford. Fitzgerald was slow to enthuse: “I am not greatly
impressed with the desire to poke out even a smatter of Persian” (1853:110), he
wrote to Cowell in October, and in December he told Fredrick Tennyson that
he was preserving only “because it is a point in common with [Cowell], and
enables us to study a little together” (1853:117). He saw nothing interesting in
the poem. In one of his letters to Anno Biddell, he said that, he stood baffled
when he was told

that Mr. Leslie Stephan, who lately lost his Wife, who was
Thackeray’s youngest Daughter, positively found Consolation in
Wordsworth’s Excursion, and –Omar.K! And he who told me –
an American Professor- said the same thing had happened to him.

This is a little Mystery…. (Letters to Anno Biddell, iii, 704)

But the same man later became so deeply attached to this work that he began to
take consolation from it.

Fitzgerald found in the verse, a new voice for his age, the Victorian
period, which was also characterized by features like doubts and disputes,
conflicts and controversies, restlessness and psychological complexity. Hence
the writers of this period assumed a prophetic role. Fitzgerald was excited and
disturbed by the scientific and social advancements of the age. In a letter to
Cowell, he observed:

The present day teems with new discoveries in Fact, which are
greater, even as regards the Soul and prospect of Men, than all
the disquisitions and quiddities of the Schoolmen. A few fossil
bones in clay and limestone have opened a greater vista back into
Time than the Indian imagination ventured upon for its gods: and
every day turns up something new. (Letters to Cowell, 1845:476)

Charles Lyell’s The Principle of Geology too impressed Fitzgerald:
My sisters are reading to me Lyell’s Geology of an Evening: there is an admirable chapter illustrative of human error and prejudice retarding the truth, which will apply to all sciences, I believe: and, if people would consider it, would be more valuable than the geological knowledge, though that is very valuable, I am sure. (*Letters to Allen*, 1837: 192)

In such a period, he thought that it was not poetic imagination which revealed the truth, but “bare Science, that every day more and more unrolls a greater Epic than the Iliad – the history of the World, the infinitudes of Space and Time!” (*Letters to Allen*, 1847:566). For the social woes, Fitzgerald found the solution in Omar Khayyam:

> Then to this earthen Bowl did I adjourn  
> My Lip the Secret Well of Life to learn:  
> And Lip to Lip it murmured- ‘While you live  
> Drink! - for once dead you never shall return.’ (xxxiv)

Khayyam provided a slice of life which enabled one to forget his woes and enjoy the present: the past may be miserable and the future bleak, but the present is beautiful.

The main historical feature of Omar’s activity as a poet, which is missing from Fitzgerald’s account is to do with the form of the *rubai* itself. Peter Avery offers a clear definition of *rubai*:

The *rubai*, pronounced rubai, plural rubaiyat, is a two-lined stanza of Persian poetry, each line of which is divided into the
hemistichs making up four altogether, hence the name rubai, an Arabic word meaning foursome... The first, second, and last of the four hemistichs must rhyme. The third need not rhyme with the other three. (1979: 7)

But, Fitzgerald observed in his “Preface”:

The original Rubaiyat (as, missing an Arabic Guttural, these Tetrastichs are more musically called), though varied, Prosody, sometimes all rhyming, but oftener (as here attempted) the third line suspending the Cadence by which the last atones with the forever Two. Something as in the Greek, Alcaic, where the third line seems to lift and suspend the Wave that falls over in the last. As usual with such kind of Oriental verse, the Rubaiyat follow one another to Alphabetic Rhyme- a strange Farrago of Grave and Gay. (2009:14)

Fitzgerald used a kinesthetic image to represent the magical effect of the rhyming rubai: the image of the rhythmical wave.

Even though Fitzgerald equated the rubai form with English quatrains, and connected the Persian landscapes of the Rubaiyat with classical pastoral of the Western tradition, it was not so. Rubai form has got high cultural significance. In this regard, Peter Avery remarks: “[it] offered Persian poets of Omar’s time an alternative to the lengthy and highly artificial panegyrics and narrative poems in a single rhyme which were the staple of official literary culture” (1979:7). Avery emphasizes the liberating potential of the rubai
It became a form identified with dissent from social and religious orthodoxy; it could circulate anonymously, was easily memorized, and could be recited in coteries of like-minded people, both for entertainment and to afford relief from oppression” (1979:9). He means that *rubai* is an unconventional stanza form symbolizing resistance to institutionalized religion and social oppression.

There is an ecological selection and temporal sequencing of the *Rubaiyat* by Fitzgerald. In his letter to Cowell on 2 Nov 1858, called the selection of quatrains “a sort of Epicurean Ecologue in Persian garden” (1858:323). The haphazard verses of Khayyam were linearly arranged. The linear narrative, according to Fitzgerald, occupies a single day, beginning with sunrise and ending with sunset: “He [Omar] begins with Dawn pretty sober and contemplative: then as he thinks and drinks, grows savage, blasphemous, etc. and then again sobers down into melancholy at nightfall” (1872:339). Hence, there is no doubt that the stanzas of the *Rubaiyat* are presented in a sequence that is foreign to the intention of the author. They correspond to the life of man, be it Khayyam or Fitzgerald.

Fitzgerald began by translating Omar into *Monkish Latin*; the manuscript which he sent to Fraser was a rough and imperfect document. It contained drafts of thirty one quatrains; most of them numbered upto ‘XII’ were in a reasonably finished state; of the remaining nineteen quatrains, eight were incomplete, but all showed evidences of drafting and revision. Thus one
can speculate that Fitzgerald’s rough and imperfect draft of *The Rubaiyat* would have undergone transformation.

Fitzgerald spelled out the objective of his translation project in his letters. He pointed out that translation of the Eastern classics was aimed at making the old classics palatable to the modern audience. He wrote to a friend in 1865. “Now, with a pair of Scissors, I *could* make that a readable Book; and being a perfectly original Work of Genius, I should like to do that Service to my Country before I die. But I should only be abused and unsold for my pains.” (1865: 548) Actually, his presumption, of authority over the texts he had translated showed his lack of belief in originative power. He revealed himself as a hypocrite, when he stated in one of his letters:

I know that I could write volume after volume as well as others of the mob of gentleman who write with ease: but I think unless a man can do better, he had best not do at all; I have not the strong inward call, nor cruel-sweet pangs of parturition, that prove the birth of anything bigger than a mouse. (1865:308)

Disguising himself as the worshipper of the Star of the East, Fitzgerald projected the image of a humanitarian translator rendering a service to the East:

I am sure I have distilled many pretty little poems out of long dull ones which the world has discarded. I do not pretend to be a poet: but I have faculty enough to mend …. As a matter of *Art*, I have no doubt whatsoever I am right: whether I am right in *morals* to use a dead man as I am not certain. (Terhune, 1980: 633)
He admitted that he had pruned, transformed and contemporized the poems. But, his observation was surcharged with a racist tone: “Not that the Persian has any thing at all new; but he has dared to say it, as Lucretius did: and now it is put into tolerable English music. That is all” (1865: 75). It seems that Fitzgerald had no ears for Persian music.

The introduction of the Arabian Nights began the reception of Eastern literature and culture in the West. They used it for knowing the customs and ceremonies of the Orient without taking the trouble of travelling to the far East for this purpose. In this context, Martha Pike observes that the introduction of *The Arabian Nights* is a landmark event in the literary history of England: “… [it is] full of the life, the colour, and the glamour of the East, [It] naturally opened a new chapter in the history of Oriental fiction in England” (1908: xxii). Tales of the Orient mystified the readers of the Europe.

British empire owed a great deal to the contributions made by William Jones. Said points out that Jones’s goal was to learn and rule as well as to compare the Orient and the Occident. Said meant that proper understanding of the Orient is essential for a rigid control of the Orient. But Jones was never explicit about the politics of colonization his voluminous works carried out:

. . . the study of Oriental languages were encouraged in Europe, a new and ample field would be opened for speculations; we should have a more extensive insight into the history of the human mind; we should be furnished with a new set of images and similitudes; and a number of excellent compositions would
be brought to light, which future scholars might explain, and future poets might imitate. (1807:360)

He thought that the literary works of the East would enrich the experiences of the British writers by providing them with new set of images and fresh insights into the working of the human mind. Jones seemed to encourage the study of the Oriental languages as a discipline. But he was conscious of the historical insights such a study could provide.

Fitzgerald’s status as a translator brought into the forefront another dimension of Orientalism: the growth of scholarly and would now academic interests in the languages and literatures of the East. William Jones was the exponent of Oriental Studies. Jones was instrumental in the introduction and subsequent popularity of Persian language in the West.

At the beginning of the Preface to Grammar of the Persian Language Jones stated that it is rich, melodious, and elegant. He felt it his duty to bring the richness of the Persian manuscripts to the attention of the Europeans. For this he produced a practical guidebook for learning the language. He wrote an unprecedented book on Persian grammar and provided his readers, especially the employees of the Company, with various examples of Persian poetry. He also suggested reading Sa‘di’s Golestán along with its translation. Thus Jones introduced to his readers not only the grammar of Persian but also more importantly, to its literature. Jones’s selections from Persian poetry, with their transliteration and translation, enabled his readers to dilute the “barren and unpleasant” subject of grammar by further reading of Persian literature.
His mode of writing not only illustrated the lessons of grammar but also reduced the tedium of the matters. Laudably, Jones encouraged his readers not to limit themselves to reading Persian literature in translation, but to acquire the language in order to read Persian literature in its original. *The Arabian Nights* and Jones’s *Works* cleared the way for the scholars of Oriental studies on the one hand and stimulated popular demand for Oriental works on the other.

Fitzgerald followed Jones’s instructions in his study of Persian and started to read Persian with Sa‘di. Though Cowell’s personality and commitment to study foreign languages inspired Fitzgerald to study Spanish and Persian, he relied more on Jones’ *Grammar of the Persian Language*. Thus, he became familiar with the great poets of Persian literature. In a letter to Cowell written on March 4-20, 1857, Fitzgerald revealed his impression of and predilection for the great poets of Persia:

I don’t speak of Jaláleddin whom I know so little of (enough to show me that he is no great Artist, however) nor Háfiz — whose *best* is untranslatable because he is the best Musician of Words. . . . I am sure that what Tennyson said to you is true: That Háfiz is the most Eastern – or, he should have said, most *Persian* – of the Persians. He is the best representative of their *Character*, whether his Sakis and Wine be real or mystical . . . . To be sure their Roses and Nightingales are repeated enough; but Háfiz and old Omar Khayyám ring like
true Metal. The philosophy of the Latter is, alas! one that never fails in the World! “Today is ours!” (1857:261-2)

But once he found Omar, he kept aside all other poets and took Omar as his favourite. Fitzgerald was rather fascinated by the Epicurean philosophy of Omar Khayyam

It is from Abol-Qásem Ferdowsi, the greatest of Persian epic poets from Tûs (Khorásan), famous solely for his *Sháh-Námeh (Book of Kings)*, that Fitzgerald had taken the names of historical and legendary figures. It is rather a roll-call of the kings and knights of Persian history or myth:

> But come with old Khayyam, and leave the Lot
> Of Kaikobad and Kaikhosru forgot:
> Let Rustum lay about him as he will,
> Or Hatim Tai cry Supper- heed them not. (ix)

Omar Khayyam advised the readers to forget the kings and warriors and listen to his poetry which is the essence of life.

Another important influence is the concept of Time in *Sháh-Námeh*. As Amin Banani maintains, that in the *Sháh-Námeh* the “drama of creation, the cosmic struggles of good and evil, the unrelenting force of nature, the deeds of men – all take place not only in time but under Time” (1988:109). In other words, Time is always present in the scene:

> Oh, come with old Khayyam, and leave the Wise
> To talk; one thing is certain, that Life flies;
One thing is certain, and the Rest is Lies;
The Flower that once has blown for ever dies. (xxvi)

Omar Khayyam was conscious of the temporal dimension of human life. Fitzgerald made cosmic time run parallel to the terrestrial time in *The Rubaiyat*.

Fitzgerald shared his first impression of reading some of Omar’s poems with Cowell:

> We read some curious Infidel and Epicurean Tetrastichs by a Persian of the 11th. century – as savage against Destiny, etc., as Manfred but mostly of Epicurean Pathos of this kind – “Drink – for – the Moon will often come round to look for us in this Garden and find us not. (1856: 234)

Fitzgerald did not choose to conceal his contempt for the Persian poet whom he called a savage and an infidel. Inspite of the primitive background of the poet, the Epicurean philosophy in the poems was strikingly remarkable. However, he enjoyed the aesthetics of Persian Poetry. “The cult of Omar” explored the aesthetic trend that establishes *The Rubaiyat* as a precious Oriental subject. It reinvented the Persian text, reconstructing it as a work of Victorian Orientalism. The poem abounds in free floating mythology of the Orient. It is conceived as a dream, a garrulous speech of someone, who is intoxicated. The message given through the translation is obvious: that life is fleeting, death is the only certainty, so you may as well have another drink:

> Come, fill the Cup, and in the Fire of Spring
   The Winter Garment of Repentance Fling.
The Bird of Time has but a little way
To fly- and Lo! The Bird is on the Wing. (vii)

It also presents a sense of the exotic Other, by providing it with mystery and remote magic:

They say the Lion and the Lizard keep
The Courts where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep:
And Bahram, the great Hunter- the Wild Ass
Stamps o’er his Head, and he lies fast asleep. (xvii)

Romantic relationship is also worked out in the poem in tune with the Epicurean philosophy:

Ah Love! Could thou and I with Fate conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits- and then
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart’s Desire! (Lxxiii)

All these highlight that the “persona” of The Rubaiyat is Fitzgerald’s invention.

Even though Fitzgerald adapted his form from the Persian, he had English precedents in his mind for the poems in quatrains that address the topic of morality: Thomas Gray’s Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard and more recently, Tennyson’s In Memoriam. He used English idioms like fools, pish and so on which belongs to colloquial speech. He also adopted native form of address like “Come with old Khayyam,” “You know, my Friends” and so on. All these three threads were woven into the poems diction which was far from being an Oriental tapestry.
Fitzgerald’s *Rubaiyat* is a poem on Omar, rather than a translation of his work. All the characteristics that he had found in the East, were attributed to Omar. At the very outset, he looked upon Omar as merely a sexual and material epicurean, who, found that his knowledge came to nothing, and that all his science would not enable him to solve the riddle of this earth; a libertine who denied all that he could not fathom, and proclaimed aloud: “Let us drink, for tomorrow we die.”

Ah, full the Cup: - What boots it to repeat
How Time is slipping underneath our Feet:
Unborn TO-MORROW, and dead YESTERDAY,
Why fret about them of TO- DAY be sweet! (xxxvii)

Thus, Omar is presented as a materialist, who seizes the present moment to enjoy the life.

Fitzgerald points to the East’s belief in fatalism, when he calls Omar a fatalist:

Ah Love! Could those and I with Fate conspire
To grasp this sorry scheme of Things entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits- and then
Remould it nearer to the Heart’s Desire! (Lxiv)

Here, Fitzgerald calls Omar a miserable man, who is unable to arrive at the real solution for the mysteries of creations. He scornfully views the eastern notion of the transitorines and uncertainty of human affairs, with the ignorance of man concerning his destiny.
Through Omar, Fitzgerald talks about the scepticism of man; after working through all the fields of science open to him, he finds himself disposed to weep despairingly over the unsatisfactory result of human knowledge. As a defeated man, he weeps over the deepest questions that perplex mankind:

And if the Wine you drink, the Lip you press,
End in the Nothing all Things end in – Yes-
Then Fancy while Thou art, Thou art but what
Thou shalt be- Nothing – thou shalt not be less. (XLvii)

He appears to be a sceptic and a nihilist.

Fitzgerald has also called Omar a failed lover, whose melancholiness has made him enter a world of intoxication, to get relieved from the pain of life:

You know, my Friends, how long since in my House.
For a new Marriage I did make carouse:
Divorced old barren Reason from my Bed,
And took the Daughter of the vine to Spouse. (XL)

He appears to be an escapist who wants to dissociate himself from the world of reason. Fitzgerald presents Omar as a pessimist, who purposefully withdraws himself from public world:

But leave the Wise to wrangle, and with me
The Quarrel of the Universe let be:
And, in some corner of the Hubbub coucht,
Make Game of that which makes as much of Thee. (XLv)
This verse echoes Fitzgerald’s abjuration of interest in political events at home or abroad.

Fitzgerald’s Omar is therefore, an Eastern subject, whose temperament, like that of many poets, is pleasure-loving and sensuous. He may have varying moods and widely deferring moments which turn him defiantly to sensuality. He drinks the forbidden wine and revels in the charm of women, mainly as a palliative against the soul’s unrest. The spiritual ecstasy and the longing for union with the Divine have been transmitted into simple drunkenness and sexual desire through the ideological apparatus of the translator. Hence, the figures of Omar is partly created and partly discovered by Fitzgerald. This makes critics to call his translation, as “The Rubaiyat of Fitz- Omar.”

Fitzgerald himself has admitted that he has taken great liberties with the text. Half of the quatrains are faithful paraphrases of the Persian text, while the rest are built upon the ideas taken from numerous kindred sources such as Hafiz’ poems and the Manliq al-Tayr (The Discourse of the Birds) of Attar. Thus a whole poetic metamorphosis took place in the translation of The Rubaiyat and it came to be called as an inspired paraphrase rather than translation. He himself refereed to its type as “transmogrification.”

Fitzgerald, through his civilizing mission, has innocuously presented the backwardness of Persia, viewed from the standpoint of “the enlightened” West. Fitzgerald describes the country as a beggarly wilderness:

Here with a Loaf of Bread beneath the Bough,

A Flask of Wine, a Book of Verse- and Thou
Beside me singing in the Wilderness-
And Wilderness is Paradise enow. (xi).

He states that its physical aspect is particularly ugly and uninteresting, consisting of a “vast dreary desert intersected with huge chains of bare, sterile mountains, whose green places were few and far between” (Binging, 1857: 374). But, Fitzgerald transforms the wilderness a heaven with the presence of wine, woman and poetry.

The poem yearns for a space which is defined by “in-betweenness”:

With me along some Strip of Herbage strown
That just divides the desert from the sown,
Whose name of Slave and Sultan scarce is known,
And pity Sultan Mahmud on his Throne. (x)

The word “scarce” seems to acknowledge that this is a fantasy, and the East should understand the primary form of social relationship with the Wext as that of the subject and the ruler.

Fitzgerald’s *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam of Naishapur* appears to be a philosophical poem. It is articulated through the sensibility of the author disguised as its dramatic speaker. By mediation, Omar has been presented as a typical Oriental character, which desperately needs the hands of the white man, to upgrade him from degradation. With this view in mind, Fitzgerald has moulded the poem in such a way as to adapt it to the new conditions of time, place, custom and habit of mind in which they reappear. Every now and then a note of the nineteenth century seems to mingle its tone with that of the twelfth,
as if the ancient Oriental melody were reproduced on a modern European instrument.

Fitzgerald’s *Rubaiyat* is a political project based on cultural Othering. In this context Said also observes:

… the Orientalist poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders it mysteries plain for and to the West. He is never concerned with the Orient except as the first cause of what he says. What he says and writes, by virtue of the fact that it is said or written, is meant to indicate that the Orientalist is outside the Orient, both as an existential and as a moral fact. (Said, 1978:21)

He points to a very important fact about Orientalist scholars. They remain outside the field of the Orient and their observations are only an outsider’s view of the experience. Fitzgerald’s inability to comprehend Eastern imagination shows that he lacked true imagination. Though he had the taste to penetrate to the exotic Other, he failed due to his poor imagination. But, his translation became an invention that made a new and better thing of the old legend, more appealing to the Western mind.

The use of translation as a space for cultural politics and hierarchical oppression can be evident in Fitzgerald’s. In a letter to Cowell in 1857, he observed:

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. (Bassnett, 1991: 3)
The “little Art” represents knowledge of Western poetics and Western systems of Discourses. Fitzgerald even dared to question the sensibility and creativity of Persian authors. He contemptuously referred to them as “…these Persians wanting in literary fineness.” (Lefevere, 1992a:106) He regarded the Persians’ lack of western literary technique and epistemology as a deficiency, leading to their poor sensibility and creativity.

Translation is not simply a process of transference from one language to another. In the process of carrying across the peripheral layers of the text, the translator comes across deep layers wrought with ideological, ethnographic and cultural constraints. Translation is, therefore, elevated from a neutral and simple linguistic act to a cultural act with its own equations of power and dominance, centre and margin. It is an ingenious political act disguised as a linguistic and aesthetic activity. Translation is an oblique means to construct cultural Otherness.

Edward Fitzgerald’s *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, clearly reflects the Western intention of distancing the Persian culture from the mainstream of Western traditions. Like other Orientalists, Fitzgerald too viewed the East as a romantic puzzle, the home of adventures like those of *The Arabian Nights*, the abode of magic, from which inspiration can be achieved. In this context, Michel Le Bris observes:

That Elsewhere, that yearned for realm where it was supposed that a man might get rid of the burden of self, that land outside
time and space, thought of as being at once a place of wandering and a place of homecoming. (quoted in Clarke, 1997:19)

For these reasons, Fitzgerald found refuge in Omar’s *Rubaiyat*.

Fitzgerald regarded his attempt to translate *The Rubaiyat* as a project to cover his inferiority by reconstructing Omar as a disturbed man, a typical Orient, who finds pleasure/ satisfaction in woman, wine and poetry. Through his work he indirectly identified the colonizing powers with order, reason and power, so that the colonized East was perceived as chaotic, irrational and weak. Thus, the East became a cipher for the Western consciousness, the repository of all that is dark, repressed and liable to eruption.