Conclusion

The coordinates of power and hierarchy traverse the realms of cultural/political experiences. These coordinates act often covertly (re)inscribing marginality to people and cultures. The state of cultural dominance leads to the situation of cultural subordinance. This involves a process of cultural Othering. The Other is constructed and perpetuated through different media including translation.

The cultural Other is a political construct created by the dominant power structures that control any society, including the colonizers. The concepts of marginalization are deliberately imprinted in the collective psyche of the dominant power groups like the cultural elite, the native bourgeois and the colonizers. In this context, Terese de Lauretis remarks: “There is nothing outside or before culture, no nature that is not always and already enculturated” (1987:21). The dominant group stamps certain groups as inferior and relegates them to the margins through agencies like education, language or translation. In this regard, it is pointed out: “The rules have little to do with nature and everything to do with culture” (Richter,1998:12). Attributing the cause of inferiority to nature is a political appropriation. Translation is not a neutral, linguistic act. It is an intricate and complex political act imbued with hierarchical equations. It forms a space where the question of power and dominance come into sharp focus. Translation also creates and perpetuates binary opposites like the self/other, centre/ margin and
dominance/subordinance. It is a medium to propagate the oppressive ideology of the dominant groups. It involves the politics of cultural Othering.

The history of translation is a never-ending one beginning with the theories of Cicero. The chronological development of translation centres on the recurring debate as to whether translations should be literal or free. The controversy over the translation of the Bible beginning with the diad discussed by St. Jerome is central to translation theories in the West. The early theorists were translators who presented a justification of their approach in a preface to the translated work. Dryden’s triad consisting of metaphrase, paraphrase and imitation, marked the beginning of a more systematic and precise definition of translation. The discussion of the practice of translation continues uninterruptedly. The discussions prove that the functions and role of the translator as well as the translation are radically changed and repeatedly redefined.

Known under various classifications like linguistic translation, ethnographic translation, literal translation, and so on, translation is in some way or another a transfer of message or textual material from one language to another. It follows a twin process of decoding and encoding. Since translation is primarily a linguistic activity, it involves intercultural transfer of ideas from one language to another, as every language is culturally conditioned. Thus, translation is not only a linguistic activity but also a cultural reconstruction.

As Octavio Paz contends, translation is one of the principal means by which we understand the world we live in. But the art of translation is
considered secondary, and hence the translator is always hidden behind the predominant author of the original. Actually, the job entrusted to the translator is a difficult one. He not only translates a text but also transforms a non-native reader to a native one. At each level, he has to pursue norms of literary excellence and fidelity to the original. He may have to make practical compromises in dealing with conflicting ideas. The difficulty faced by the translator makes one realize that translation is an open-ended task in which the translator, the author/ writer, the original work, and the translated work and the readers move back and forth between two different sets of languages, cultures, historical situations and aesthetic contexts of sensibility.

In the East and the West, the role and function of translation as well as the translator are different. When the Indian metaphysics equates translation with the transmigration of soul, the Western literary traditions equate it with the “Other.” This difference in the perspective leads to the difference in the role of the translator. In the East, the translator is meant to restate and revitalize the original, while in the West, the translator is meant to show his cultural superiority over the Other. This philosophy of individualism and metaphysics of guilt render him incapable of grasping the origins of literary tradition.

Translation is a complex and intricate process. It is a process which is hindered by structural, lexical and contextual constraints. Though translation is defined as a replacement of textual material from one language by equivalent textual material in another language, it is difficult if not impossible as a practice. This is because attempt to find equivalence, both linguistic and
cultural, is perverse. As language and culture are inter-linked, there is often null equivalence or zero equivalence for culturally conditioned linguistic units. This leads to the problems of untranslatability.

The problems of equivalence and untranslatability lead the translator to the limits of translation. Though the process of translation involves only three stages- analysis, transfer, and restructuring- it is complicated at each level. Each text is so individualistic that an attempt to translate it will create only “metatexts” or rather “versions” of it. This gives the translator unlimited freedom to manipulate the text as he finds it suitable. Translations thus become a cultural and political project, which is linked to the ideology or cultural identity of the power structures that dominate the society.

The political appropriation of translation became evident during the period of European colonization. During this period translation was used as part of the imperialistic agenda to domesticate the Orient. So translation is related to colonial expansion, hegemony and oppression on the one hand and access to the knowledge and power on the other. For the Orientalist translators translation was an oblique form of politics. They projected it as a service rendered to patronize the East and to protect the Eastern literature from oblivion. This attitude was evident in the expression of the colonizers:

The primary object of Great Britain, let it be acknowledged, was rather to discover what could be obtained from her Asiatic subjects, than how they could be benefited. In process of time it was found expedient to examine how they might be benefited
inorder that we might continue to hold the advantages which we at first derived from them...[Their] happiness is committed to our care. (Parliamentary Papers, Observations, 8, 831-1832:20)

This question of how England could serve the people of India blends indistinguishably with the question of how the power of the British empire could be consolidated. The translation of Eastern texts helped the imperial powers to achieve significant consolidation of colonial domination.

The translation of texts from cultures that are civilizationally separated, and among which exist unequal power relations in terms of cultural dominance and subordinance, is an extremely complex process. This actually brings into focus the position of the translated text within the intersecting networks of culture and politics: it consolidates the appropriation of the translated text in the context of the positioning of the translator, his culture and the original text/culture being translated. This is an interlocking system of power relations. These power relations create an “image” of the target culture extending the hegemony of the dominant group. These “images” are in fact responsible for creating the notion of “the Other.” This is especially true in the case of translations of native works by the colonizers. The colonialist discourse was designed to domesticate the Orient. They used the translation strategy first to understand the Orient and then to control them both internally and externally. Thus, translation came to be used as a covert politics for erasing the native/indigenous languages and cultures, clearing the path for the domination of the
colonial culture. This oblique politics was more powerful than the explicit politics of discrimination, practiced by the colonizers.

The translations of the Oriental texts by the West need be read in the light of the construction of the ideology of colonial oppression. The colonizers attempt showed that the empire had a vital interest in the production of knowledge about the Orient. More importantly, they were interested in the delivery of that knowledge to mankind in the guise of objective knowledge. This was in fact an appropriation of the knowledge and misrepresentation of the culture and experiences of the colonized. While circulating this mediated knowledge, they showed the world that the native mind required a “stricter sense of truth,” which could be provided only through the intervention of the Western rationality. In this context, the observation of Gauri Viswanathan is remarkable:

We may teach our students to cultivate language, and we only add strength to sophistry; we teach them to cultivate their imagination, and it only gives grace and colour to delusion; we teach them to cultivate their reasoning powers, and they find a thousand resources in allegory, in analogy, and in mysticism, for evading and discrediting truth. (1989:157)

Thus, the Orientalists projected themselves in the exalted image of the producers of knowledge that empowered them to conquer, appropriate and manage the whole Asiatic race. The knowledge they produced were selectively distributed and appropriated to justify the colonial intervention. Thus, under the
sublime notion of humanistic enterprise of bridging the gap between the peoples or cultures, they promoted dichotomies romanticizing and mystifying the Orient. Hence translation continues to be an ethnographic project of disguised power politics.

The Orientalists translations of the Eastern classics like *Shakuntalam, The Rubaiyat, The Bhagavat Gita*, and *Manusmruti*, are ethnographic projects undertaken by Orientalists like William Jones, Edward Fitzgerald and Charles Wilkins. They emphasized the importance of Oriental studies and translations for the efficient administration of the British colonies. For them translation was a colonial agenda of dehistoricizing and neutralizing oppositions to the ethnocentric violence in translation.

The curiosity and ambition to conquer the Asiatic land led William Jones to translate Kalidasa’s *Shakuntalam* as *Sacontala or The Fatal Ring*. He used the text as a means to study the geography of the place and the culture of the people with a view to controlling India. His translation was an imperial project carried out in the disguise of refinement. The selection of the text provided him with ample scope for using the strategy of domesticating the Orient.

Kalidasa’s *Shakuntalam* is full of extremely sensous, colourful and concrete imagery showing the Hindu traditions. Probably for the Westerners the drama appeared as an exotic, largely unknown world that needed Europeans mission of civilizing process. Written from the perspective of *Natyasastra*, the drama highlights the concepts of Indian values, womanhood, ascetic life,
astrological knowledge and the Brahmanical high culture that prevailed in that period. Jones found these particulars sufficient to learn the Orient and then to control it.

In his strategy to domesticate the Orient, Jones transported the high cultural values of the text to give a feel of the Indian mystique. The main characters were transformed to suit his purpose. For instance, Kalidasa’s Shakuntala was a “child of nature,” but Jones transformed her as a “rustic girl,” the “feminine east,” that lacked voice. Like the East, her modesty was misrepresented as eternal, uniform and incapable of defining itself. On the contrary, Dushyanta represented the colonial powers that wanted to colonize the land as well as the female body. Thus, the whole text was reworked keeping in mind the East as the cultural contestant of the West, the cultural Other.

Jones’s attempt to translate *Shakuntalam* showed his inefficiency to capture the Eastern sensuousness. He was aware of this deficiency, and he called his work a transliteration. Eventhough he appeared to be apologetic, he made his translation speak for the Westerners. By translating the sexual aspects of nature as appearances of coarseness, and by projecting the high culture of the East as customs and manners of savage tribes, he succeeded in his mission of constructing the East as the cultural Other. Though he failed to evoke *rasa*, he succeeded in his attempt to set the Indians, the Orient as a foil of contrast against the “rich West.”

Jones appropriated Kalidasa’s classic by providing a colonial/ imperial framework to the relations between the characters. He attempted the translation
with a preconceived view of the Eastern classics as “isolated literary islands.” He wanted to show the West these texts which he thought were aberrations. In his translation he portrayed Sakuntala as a savage beauty representing the negative cultural traits attributed to the Orient. The character of Dushyanta was explored as a dominant and refined ruler encompassing in himself all the political characterization of the colonial West. So Jones’s translation can be called as rewriting of *Shakuntalam* with a colonial framework. In this attempt he was guided by political exigency rather than aesthetic contentment. His attempt was to justify the colonial intervention of the Indian subcontinent and to consolidate the position of the British empire by projecting an image of a benevolent patron and an agent of refinement.

Edward Fitzgerald’s translation of the Persian classic, *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam of Naishapur*, is a clear evidence of a political project based on cultural Othering. Though never explicit about the politics of colonization, Fitzgerald thought that the literary works of the East would enrich the European minds by providing new sets of images and insights into the working of the human mind. But he thought that the Orientals lacked aesthetic and literary exposure and training.

Omar Khayyam, the Persian astronomer-poet, found the twelfth century highly disturbing. He felt that the people of his age were victims of a tendency wherein men of science were discredited and philosophers were greatly interested only in outward show. Omar, as a man unremitting in his search for truth, wrote certain quatrains in the form of rubai. This form, rubai, was used
deliberately as it had got great cultural significance. It provided an entertainment and relief from cultural oppression. Its unconventionality showed its resistance to institutionalized religion and social oppression.

Such a half-religious, half-philosophical utterance was seen by Fitzgerald as a sort of Epicurean Ecologue. While doing so, he was projecting his objective behind the translation. He was eager to make the Persian classic palatable to the modern European audience. For this he assumed the guise of a worshipper of Khayyam, and projected the image of a humanitarian translator. Very wisely he admitted that he had pruned, transformed and contemporarized the poem to suit the Western sensibility. He himself has called his translation a sort of transmogrification.

Fitzgerald’s translation openly expressed his contempt for the Persian poet, whom he called a savage and an infidel. The whole poem was reconceived as a dream, a garrulous speech of someone who was intoxicated. Through the translation Khayyam became the representative of the East. Epithets exemplifying the Negative Other like materialist, fatalist, sceptic, escapist and so on were attributed to him. This was intended to show that the uncivilized, barbaric, savage East desperately needed the highly rational hands of the West to refine them. Thus, Fitzgerald reinvented the text to suit Victorian Orientalism.

The translation may be called as “The Rubaiyat of Fitz-Omar,” where the spiritual ecstasy and longing for union with the Divine in the original was transmitted into simple drunkenness and sexual desire through the ideological
apparatus of the translator. Thus, Fitzgerald moulded the poem and adapted it to the new conditions of time, place and culture in which it reappeared.

Fitzgerald made a spatio-temporal transference of Omar’s *The Rubaiyat*: the social disillusionment of the twelfth century Persia was shifted to the social conflicts of the Victorian England. But Fitzgerald translated the Persian poetry with an imperfect understanding of the original, its writer, the representative age, its culture and people of Persia. He explicitly expressed his racial prejudice and Xenophobia in the Preface to his translation. Fitzgerald overlooked the poetic craft of the Persian poets and ignored the sensibility of the Persian readers. He failed to understand the linguistic and cultural utterances of the original. He found Omar’s poetic craft unrefined and untrained. The unchallenged liberty he took with the original was taken as an evidence of the insignificance of the Persian poets. The mystical elements of Omar’s poetry, especially its Sufist ethos, were ignored by Fitzgerald. He substituted the spiritual echoes with Epicurean maxims to suit the escapist tendency of the troubled Victorians.

The fascination for the philosophical texts embedded with Eastern wisdom led Orientalists like Charles Wilkins and William Jones to translate *The Bhagavat Gita* and *Manusmriti*. Even though they admitted that these texts were substitutes in the moments of crisis, they wisely mixed politics and religion in the affairs of the state with a view to dominating the colonized.

*The Bhagavat Gita*, which appears outwardly as a series of dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna, is a valuable treatise containing religious
and ethical teachings. These ideas are difficult to comprehend as they are highly allegorical. This was one of the major reasons where Wilkins found the Hindu doctrines totally different from the doctrines of the Westerners. He found it easy to use translation as an ethnographic project to show the difference between the East and the West. In doing so, he nullified the significance of the original.

Wilkins translation falls into the category of literal translation. He found the rich wisdom emanating from the text as highly confusing. He found that many passages were obscure and clothed with fancy unsuited to the Western taste. Hence he used the opportunity to make a comparative evaluation in which one culture could be set off and measured against the Other. Wilkins projected an image of Indians as men devoid of ethics. Ignoring religious sentiments, he went to the extent of calling Lord Krishna as a man of no moral distinctions. His translation had provided space for the translator to make unwarranted remarks on Hinduism, thereby establishing the supremacy of the Western culture. On the other side, the translation shows intellectual parallax of Westerners to see things and thoughts under the same light as they would appear to an Eastern eye. Their inability to understand a world outside their proximity is shown through the translation.

Colonization was inevitably followed by Anglicization and Christianization of India. Ancient wisdom embedded in Indian scriptures and philosophical texts could not be comprehended by the Europeans. So they found it strange and confusing. Indian metaphysics, rendered in allegorical and
metaphorical forms, was taken literally by the translators like Wilkins. His indifferent translation of *The Bhagavat Gita* was a virtual inferiorization of Indian metaphysics, the Advaita philosophy. But Wilkins’s translation served its political objective of portraying the Orient as inferior, primitive and culturally negative. He succeeded in constructing the image of India as the negative Other of the West, lacking in rationality and vision. The imperfect rendering of Indian philosophy by Wilkins not only denigrated Indian systems of knowledge but also constructed the image of India as wanting in rational thinking and analytical consciousness. This created the impression of India as a primitive community with a confused philosophy, fanciful metaphysics and a defective education system. In contrast, the colonizers became rational and civilized, who could make remedial interventions in India.

The compelling necessity to rule a country which differed significantly from the norms of Western social and religious practices led William Jones to translate *Manusmriti*. He found it necessary to understand India to rule it efficiently. The British establishment found *Manusmriti* as the principal text that dealt with the laws of the land. So Jones was entrusted by Warren Hastings to translate it.

*Manusmriti*, the greatest Indian *Dharmasastra*, is attributed to Manu, the First Born. His name is synonymous to the root *man* which means to think or rationalize. Hence, it urges mankind to use its rationality to lead a successful and prosperous life based on cultural values. Though it is recorded as the greatest repository of Indianess, Westerners like Jones, proved through
translation that the work is baseless, purely subjective and widely theoretical. Many of Manu’s injunctions were considered by the West as impractical; hence they were regarded as revelations of aberrated mind. This intention resulted in the construction of the Other. The translation proves that if the genius of Sanskrit literature synthesized and harmonized disparate elements to fit a Brahmanical conception, the whole thrust of historical instruction during the period of British rule was to break them down and force a steady gaze on each element in isolation.

The translation of *Manusmriti* is an attempt at domesticating a text with a view to domesticating a country. In this translation the British colonizers followed the policy of ruling India by the laws prevailing in India. But they appropriated the laws so that they were advantageous to the colonizers. The colonizers exploited the divine origin of Manu’s institutes to their advantage. At the same time, they highlighted the Brahmanical bias in *Manusmriti* and discarded the system of the award of disproportionate punishment for the same crime on the basis of caste, gender and age. Jones found that certain injunctions and institutes were not only castiest but also impractical. He agreed that they were impractical because they were disadvantageous to the rulers. Jones also exposed the contradictions in *Manusmriti* and tried to level the contradictions in the application of laws. Instead of evaluating Manu’s institutes in their totality, Jones considered each institute in isolation and evaluated it severely. This one-to-one analysis was convenient to the colonizers. The translation of
Manusmriti is a classic illustration of the appropriation of a text for political control of a country.

The Orientalist translations of the four Eastern classics show that the Orient was significant to Europe not only for its sheer proximity, but also for the fact that European states had their richest and oldest colonies in the territory which also contributed to European civilizations and languages. The Orient was also Europe’s cultural contestant, and hence, one of the most significant images of the Other. In addition to defining its Other through these translations, Europe used the contrasting images, ideas, personalities and experiences of the Orient to (re) define itself.

The Western intellectuals were always enthusiastic to create an Orient that was a fabric of ideological fictions. Their purpose was to confirm the West’s sense of identity and to legitimize Western cultural and political superiority. Thus, Orientalism became a “colonizing knowledge” which generated stereotypical dichotomies between the rational, democratic, humanistic, creative, dynamic, progressive and “masculine” West and the irrational, despotic, oppressive, backward, passive, stagnant and “feminine” East. In psychological terms this ideologically surcharged representation of the East could be seen as the repressed self of the West. Western intellectuals and writers developed an extensive repertoire of clichés, images, polarities and oppositions derived not from historical realities, but from a troubled fantasy life and the imperatives of power.
Orientalist translations prove that knowledge can never be innocent. It is deeply implicated in the operations of power. The Orientalists were inevitably chasing mirages, constructing mirror-images and projecting their own fantasies on an artificial screen called “the East” or “the Orient.” But, it must be noted that the East which had philosophical, artistic and spiritual riches, could share its rich and inevitable legacy with the Western world which lost its religious bearings. As Said remarks, the Orient was “Orientalised” by the Westerners, not only because it was found to be Oriental but also because it could be made Oriental. The Orientalists explored the advantages of the discourses of knowledge and power to define and restrict the Orient and its people without significant resistance of counter-discourses from the Orient’s side. The Eastern society was traditionalized and Sanskritised in an Orientalist way through these translations of Eastern classics. Thus, the Orient was permanently entrapped in the stereotypical space constructed by the Orientalist discourses of epistemology and power.