Introduction

Translation, in the ordinary sense, denotes the process by which meanings are transferred from one language to another. As a political or cultural act, translation can be located on the margins of the monological truth in the direction of a transformative recreation of an inherited tradition. Translation is an essentially political project that unleashes the epistemological challenge of discontinuity, but it reunites the various threads into a new textual fabric. Translation can no longer be seen as a one-way flow from the source to the target culture, but a two-way transcultural enterprise. Translation is not an innocuous linguistic act. It is surcharged with political significance at every stage.

Translation is essentially a kind of cultural study which involves the rendering of a text from Source Language (SL) into a Target Language (TL) ensuring that the meaning of the two will be approximately the same and the syntactic and semantic structures of the source text will be preserved as far as possible. Though it seems to be an apparently linguistic act, it involves intercultural transfer of signifiers. As culture represents identity, translation involves a process of cultural identification. This virtually means that any kind of mediation in translation consists of cultural politics.

Translation is one of the popular means by which the texts written in the indigenous languages of various countries are made available in western, metropolitan languages. As a “linguistic migration” translation
becomes the primary vehicle through which the “Third World” cultures are transported and recuperated by audiences in the West. In this regard, John Sturrock’s observation is appropriate:

In some quarters, ethnography has come to be seen as specifically concerned, no longer with the disingenuous description of other cultures, but with their “translation” into a form comprehensible to ourselves. An explicit “translation” of an alien society’s customs, rites, and beliefs is no longer mistakable for the “real” thing, it is a version or account of another culture familiarized for us through the agency of a translator ethnographer. (quoted in Dingwaney and Maier, 1996: 4)

Sturrock means that translation of the cultural entities like customs, rituals or beliefs is only a variant of the exotic culture. He warns the readers not to mistake the cultural version for the real thing: it is only an appropriated version intended for ethnographic purpose. In this connection, it is interesting to note the remarks of Harold de Campos. He underlines the fact that translation often serves the translator’s ethnographic objective alone: “Translation as transfusion. Of blood. Ironically, we could talk of vampirization, thinking now of the translator’s nourishment” (1981:208). He hints at the inevitable marginalization of the aesthetic and literary aspects of the process.

The process of translation involves making another culture comprehensible to the target audience; but it entails varying degrees of violence, especially when the culture being translated is constituted as the
“Other.” Translation involves an attempt of appropriation or mediation. Conventionally, the Orientalist translation is considered a service rendered by the Western scholars to the Orient. But there is a deceptively political agenda behind the art of translation, especially the Orientalist translations of Eastern Classics. It is based on the colonial tactics of understanding the Orient with a view to domesticating the Orient. The Orientalist translation is, therefore, a political strategy of European colonialism. The critical focus of this project is to identify and estimate the elements of politics like power, hegemony, domestication, cultural Othering, Xenophobic references and linguistic oppression in the westerners’ translation of the Oriental works.

The Orientalist translation is essentially a cultural politics constituted by cultural oppression, cultural hegemony, cultural domestication and cultural Othering. It was part of an ethnographic project to show the West the “barbaric” literary islands and to “civilize” the savage communities. Translations popular in the West are representative of India and its culture. They bear testimony to the binding power of representation, which reminds that Indians are trapped in the cultural stereotypes, created and popularized through the translated texts. In this context, translation is a subversive strategy that justifies colonization as part of “the white man’s burden to civilize the Orient.”

The political strategy used by the imperial centre is unraveled by Edward Said in his pioneering work *Orientalism*. He defines Orientalism as a terrain of discourse which constructs the Orient as the Other of Europe. The colonizers perceive that the best way to control the Orient is by
constructing the Orient as the Negative Other. With this view in mind they subverted the values, practices and modes of Eastern life. In this process, translation generates not only ambiguity in the reading of the translated texts, but ambivalence also in the cultural relations between the colonizer and the colonized.

The play of cultural politics in translation is especially vehement when the encounter is between the colonizer’s language and the language of the colonized. In this context, translation is a semiotic dynamics between the two languages or cultures which ensures the dominance of Western hegemony. It reminds one of the dominant metaphors of husbanding “virgin lands,” tilling them and fertilizing them and hence “civilizing” them.

Translations of texts from cultures, which are not civilizationally linked, and among which unequal power relations exist, pose great problems. They bring into focus the position of the translated text within the intersecting networks of a culture and the manipulations behind it. Translations often operate under varied constraints; these constraints include manipulations of power relations that aim at constructing an image of the source culture that preserves or extends the hegemony of the dominant group. In fact, these images construct the notions of the Other.

The tyranny and power of these “images” constructed by the colonizer is clear in the translations of the native works done by the colonized. Their rewriting often involves intense manipulations and simplification for the sake of gaining recognition in and by the metropole. The discursive parameters
of the dominant power are such that they restrict the entry of texts that do not fit into the idea of the Other.

While choosing texts for rewriting, the dominant culture appropriates the texts in order to make them conform to the discursive parameters of the colonialist discourses. The linguistic and cultural matrixes make them complex and varied. They are never presented as the experiences of a culture that is simple, natural, otherworldly or spiritual. They are negatively constituted as violent, primitive and uncontrolled. It politically justifies the disciplinary measures organized as part of the civilizing mission which is considered the righteous duty of the Whites. The Orientalist translations are, therefore, appropriations of the Orient carried out as a political project to subordinate the cultural identity of the Orient.

The first chapter of the study, *The Poetics of Translation*, gives a detailed account of the nature and theories of translation, proving that translation is not a marginal activity, but a primary and serious cultural act. It is relegated to a secondary position because of the restricted notion that it involves merely the rendering of a Source Language Text into a Target Language text, observing as closely as possible the surface structures and meaning of the Source Language, without distorting the Target language structures. Hence, it is often perceived as a mechanical process rather than a creative one.

As the term denotes, translation involves the transfer of message from Source language to Receptor language without losing meaning and following
the original style. Theorists like Etienne Dolet, Joseph Cosagrande, and J.C. Catford agree that the transfer is essentially inter-cultural. This amounts for the concept of “mistranslations.” It is an observed fact that when a number of translators translate the same text there can be as many translations as there are translators. This makes Catford to coin “shifts” in translation.

These inferences lead one to assess translation as a multi-dimensional process in which the translator has to deal with his material, means, resources and objectives simultaneously. Indian theorists like Ramanujan and Hirayana explain the difficulty of the translator in maintaining fidelity as well as compromising conflicting demands and allegiances. The translators usually straddle two cultures, attached to specific locales. They address their works primarily to the readers whose tastes they share. This dual orientation of their works makes them the privileged mediators. Hence, they become “translated m[e]n” (Rushdie, 1983:24). Through them translation becomes a form of mediation. The graphocentric nature of the original is continually challenged and renewed in translation. Thus, translation becomes a rediscovery of textuality.

The second chapter, The Problems of Translation, discusses the problems the translator encounters in his linguistic and cultural enterprise. The major problems of translation are related to equivalences, shifts and untranslatability. They determine the fidelity of translation. In a recent interview with Nikos Papastergiadis, Ashis Nandy draws our attention to the fact that mistranslation often proceeds from “the bankruptcy of available
categories” in the target language (Dingwaney and Maier, 1996:5). The source text, a semiotic construct of indeterminate range, is negotiated by seizing on a feasibly tractable part of its range and imposing on it a similar segment of another indeterminate construct in another language. This exercise demonstrates its own impossibility. Hence, this theory of untranslatability is deliberated in this chapter. Problems loom largely due to the unavailability of appropriate equivalences. J.C.Catford refers to translation as a process involving the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent material in another language (TL) (1965:20). But, it is obvious that complete textual equivalence is a myth, since sameness cannot exist between two versions of the same text. This makes Jakobson declare that all poetic art is technically untranslatable (1959:232-9). This makes theorists like James Holmes announce that the term equivalence is perverse. Each text is so individualistic that an attempt to translate it will create only metatexts. So the process of transference from Source Language to Target Language can better be called transcreation.

The third chapter, *The Politics of Translation*, focuses on translation as a form of cultural politics. Politics is the way in which a society is organized and related to a set of values and strategies used to fortify them. According to Lawrence Venuti, a translator can adopt two methods: domesticating method and foreignizing method (1993: 210). This makes it clear that a literary text is an ideological product. It has the capacity to create an illusionary consciousness which distorts actual historical conditions.
As Althusser remarks, ideology has the power to turn people into subjects: that is, people are positioned or interpellated by forms of communication. Gramsci argues that historically, the ruling classes have been able to exercise leadership not through direct coercion but by indirect means, through the concept of hegemony. Said links his concept of Orientalism to Gamsci’s concept of hegemony. According to him, in the act of rearticulating the colonial script, they (mis)translate it to produce “a qualitatively different thing-in-itself” (Parry, 1987:41).

Thus, Orientalism is not only a system of control but also a tool that allows the colonialists to reinforce their position, and to consolidate their identity. Translations assume significance in colonial expansion as the imperial powers took great effort to study the Orient in order to domesticate and control the Orient. It can be concluded that besides the linguistic and cultural mediation, the colonialist project of translation involves political mediation.

The subsequent chapters focus on the Orientalist translations of Eastern classics. For this, the translation of four classics is evaluated: William Jones’s *Shakuntala* or *The Fatal Ring*, Charles Wilkins’s *Bhagavat-Geeta* or *Dialogues of Kreeshna and Arjoon*, Jones’s *Institutes of Hindu Laws: Ordinances of Menu*, and Edward Fitzgerald’s *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. They belong to different canons of classics: drama, metaphysics, legal code and poetry.

The fourth chapter, *Translating the Literary Other*, analyses two masterpieces of Eastern literature- William Jones’s *Shakuntala* or
William Jones’s translation of Kalidasa’s *Shakuntala* as *Sacontala* or *The Fatal Ring* is considered a revolutionary contribution made by him to the field of Orientalism. His main objective through this translation was to utilize it as an ethnographic project. His interest in the Eastern drama as well as his reason for selecting this particular text is evident in the Preface to the translation. The analysis of the text proves that his selection has definitely helped him to use the strategy of domestication. Moreover, the analysis shows the various attempts made by Jones to document and codify the details of the Orient into an official record, as he found it necessary to study the colonized first and then to control them.

*The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, translated by Edward Fitzgerald, brought to limelight not only the character of Omar but also that of Fitzgerald. It is a classical example of the kind of translation which projects the Negative Other. The evaluation explains in detail how the translator acquainted himself with this Persian classic, and became attached to it. This over-attachment led to the invention of a new Omar, more appealing to the Western mind.

The fifth chapter, titled *Domesticating the Texts*, studies the translations of Charles Wilkins’s *Bhagavat-Geeta* or *Dialogues of Kreeshna and Arjoon*, and, Jones’s *Institutes of Hindu Laws: Ordinances of Menu*. Both these translations reflect the fascination that the Europeans had towards the eastern countries. It also shows how the translations of these texts have been used as a disguised attempt to restrict the colonized subject within the discursive space.
that does not challenge the sophisticated, advanced and cultural values of the West.

Westerners got acquainted with the *Bhagavat Gita* through its translation made by Charles Wilkins. Even then, the originality has been lost due to the appropriation brought in by cultivating a sense of foreignness. The great Eastern philosophy was diluted to suit the Western sensibility. The advice of wisdom was viewed as curious specimens of literature, mythology and morality of ancient Hindus, much shocking to their moral and religious sentiments. Thus, the translation is referred to as a literal one; but it failed to interpret the thought and culture of a nation and a race different from one’s own.

The immediate necessary to rule a country, significantly different from the norms of Western behaviour and practices led William Jones to translate *Manusmriti*. While translating one of the greatest Indian works on *Dharmasastra*, the Westerners showed their inefficiency to render it correctly. In order to mask their fault, they proved through their writings that our laws are baseless, subjective and widely theoretical. The analysis shows how the Orient got subordinated in this process.

Briefly, the Orientalist translations of Eastern classics mark the explicit attempt made by the Europeans to annihilate the native literatures and to make them incapable of aspiring for any intellectual distinctions. Translators like Jones and Fitzgerald were actually using their power of language to create ideological conditions of domination. Standard British literary histories also
illustrate the attempts at cultural domination. They juxtaposed all writers of English, erasing cultural differences among them. This makes Stephen Greenblatt disapprove of them as voices of the victorious and the vanquished put together, but mixed and impure. Translation in this context becomes a covert ideological battle, to erase the cultural identity of the colonized. In the translation of non-Western cultures, it is imperative that the translators make use of their linguistic power and privileged vantage point for cultural dominance. This task makes them aware of their own locations with respect to the cultures they study. They are fully aware of whom they write for, within what contexts, and, more than anything else, the mediated status of their accounts.