Chapter III

The Politics of Translation

In contemporary sense the term “politics” has wide-ranging connotations. Even Aristotle used the term in a special sense: ideas that make radical changes in society. Recently, it is used as synonymous with ideology. Althusser defines politics / ideology as a set of ideas in the unconscious that makes one represents reality in a particular way. Adorno and Macherry question the relevance or effectiveness of conscious political indoctrination. Macherry states that politics/ ideology is assimilated unconsciously by the society. Adorno thinks that ideology is unconsciously transmuted into art: so unconsciously committed art stands above consciously committed art (1996: 202). He, therefore, considers Kafka or Beckett a better artist than Brecht.

Gramsci however means governance by the term politics. He perceives of any governance in terms of cultural dominance and subordinance. Gramsci states that there are two types of governance: the rule by force like dictatorships and the rule by consent like democracies (1998: 124 ). Foucault connects politics to power. He observes that power is all-pervasive. There are two kinds of power: regime power and penal/ disciplinary power. Foucault points out that regime power operates at every part of the society with disciplinary power. He defines ideology / politics as the ways in which the society is organized and it is evident in the power relations of
the organization (1991:18). He adds that ideology is reflected in the power structures of the masters as well as the worldview of the subjects. Foucault observes that politics is related to a set of values and the strategies involved in strengthening them. Every regime wants to perpetuate itself and invents strategies for this purpose. Politics includes these strategies.

But the term “politics” generally refers to the distribution and operation of power. As already stated, it is not confined to electoral or party politics; nor is it limited to the operation of power by the state. Instead, it deals with the ways in which power operates, the range of sites in which power is distributed in the society. The word “politics” is derived from the Greek word *polis*, which means a city state. In ancient Greece, city state was the centre of life of the people. It was the basic unit of organization. Even though modern states are largely territorial, the term “political” continues to be used with respect to the state. With the advent of behavioural approach in the twentieth century, there occurred a shift of focus from institutions or structures of power to its functions and processes. Politics thus becomes an activity, and the institutions become the framework of this activity.

Translation has been a cultural and political project; it is inextricably linked to the ideology/ cultural identity of the power structures that dominate the society. Translation is part of the Orientalist agenda that conceptually assisted the colonization of the East. Translation forms part of the ethnographic project intended to show the world the “barbaric” literary islands or continents and to civilize the barbaric communities. The Orientalists thought that these
literary islands, insulated from the West, were primitive and, therefore, they lacked sophistication. The Europeans, who believed in their innate sense of responsibility to civilize the world, found an excuse to intervene in the cultural life of the colonies. These interventions helped them to evolve the political strategies to expand and reinforce the colonial oppression of the East.

Translation is thus part of the colonialist discourse designed with a view to domesticating the Orient. Translation has therefore an explicit relation with colonial expansion or the establishment of the empire. This is equally true of the colonization of the Orient or Latin America. In this context, Eric Cheffitz remarks: “Translation is the central act of European colonization and imperialism in America” (1991:104). Domestication of the colonies could be achieved only through an understanding of the colonies. So translation has been used as a strategy to understand and then to control the colonies. The development of translation is indirectly linked to the power structures that have assisted the colonization. In this regard, Tejaswini Niranjana observes: “Translation both shapes and takes shape within the asymmetrical power relations of the power that operate under colonization” (1992:2). She underlines that translation is not merely a linguistic or cultural act. It is a political/ideological act that reinforces colonization, both external and internal. It is related to colonial expansion, oppression and hegemony on the one hand and access to the knowledge and power on the other.

One of the earliest explicit references to the politics inherent in the act of translation is Werner Winter’s essay, “Translation as Political Action.”
The essay “The Economics and Politics of Translation” written jointly by Marcia Nita Doron and Marilyn Gaddis Rose provides a simplistic analysis of the politics of translation, connecting publishing to market strategies. In this essay, “politics” is used in the sense that it is connected to the representation of history and relations of power. The cultural and political agenda of the translator has been explained by Lawrence Venuti while discussing the norms of translation:

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

Venuti considers foreignizing strategy of translation a desirable quality that restrains the ethnocentric violence of translation. He regards the other strategy of translation, domestication of the source text, as the domination of Western culture. Venuti disapproves of domestication, as it involves an ethnocentric reduction of the source text to target language cultural values.

Through the interplay of culture and politics translators often perpetuate the hierarchies preserved by the society. In the process, they help to sanctify the cultural Othering practiced as a form of hegemonic marginalization. Translation is implicitly related to authority, legitimacy and power. Translators can be used to legitimize the power of those who rule the cultural community.
The use of translation as an oppressive tool is not a recent phenomenon. It has been prevalent since the beginnings of translation. But it is only with the influence of culture, gender and ideology that such poetological strategies come to be fully recognized.

Translation has been a covert form of politics aimed at erasing native/indigenous language and culture and clearing the path for the domination of colonial culture. This oblique politics is more powerful than the explicit politics of discrimination, practiced by the colonizers. In this context, the remarks of Tipu Sultan’s minister are appropriate: “We are not afraid of what we do see of the British power, but of what we do not see,” (quoted in Parliamentary Papers: Observations, 29, 1852-1853:42). Though the minister points to unfair warfare and trade practices, it is equally true of cultural politics including translation. In this regard, Vicenti Rafael explains the difference in significance, translation had for the Spanish colonizers and the Tagalog people of the Philippines:

For the Spaniards, translation was always a matter of reducing the native language and culture to accessible objects for the subjects of divine and imperial intervention. For the Taglogs, translation was a process less of internalizing colonial-Christian conventions than that of evading their totalizing grip by repeatedly marking the difference between their language and interests and those of the Spaniards. (1988:213)
Rafael means that translation is a political tool that makes native language and culture vulnerable for colonial intervention whereas it is a discriminating marker that differentiates the cultural priorities of the colonized from those of the colonizers. Subordination of the colonized is one of the political objectives of colonization. This is also carried out through indirect politics like translation.

Translation is a form of domination which can be used as a hegemonic activity detrimental to the cultural / political identity of the subordinate classes. The political choices are spelled out in the most chilling terms by J. Farish in a minute issued in the Bombay Presidency: “The Natives must either be kept down by a sense of our power, or they must willingly submit from a conviction that we are more wise, more just, more humane, and more and more anxious to improve their condition than any other rulers they could possibly have” (quoted in Gauri Viswanathan, 1989:2). The British expected the Indian subjects to endorse the superiority of the imperialists and to live accordingly. As this was not successful, they subordinated them through hegemonic measures. Translation was a form of oblique hegemony.

There was a time when Europe was regarded as the great “Original,” the starting point, and the colonies were, therefore, copies or translations of Europe, which they were supposed to translate. Moreover, being copies, translations were evaluated as inferior to the originals. This made translation a lesser creative activity in the literary hierarchy. This degraded evaluation
forced translation to occupy a secondary status in the linguistic and literary process of any culture.

For centuries, translation was only a one-way process, with the text being translated into European languages for European consumption. They tampered with the texts so that they would not prove alien to the receiving culture. The European translators reminded us of the dominant metaphor of colonialism, that of rape, of husbanding “virgin lands”, tilling them, fertilizing them and hence civilizing them. The European imperialism justified colonialism by imaging it as parallel to cultivation: colonialism civilizes the colonized just as cultivation makes the soil fertile and appropriate for human use. This parallel is extended to translation. Translations by Europeans were based on the assumption that the original writers of the colonies were inferior to the European writers. European translations of the Orient were anchored on a myopic vision of inequality of the races: the Orient is inferior to the Europe. In this regard, it is worth to quote Edward Fitzgerald: “It is an amusement to me to take whatever liberties I like with these 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). Fitzgerald thought that the Persians (or the writers of the East) were inferior creative artists who had no adequate exposure to poetics or aesthetics: they were untutored in poetic art. He made translation an indirect means to assert the supremacy of the dominant European culture.
As a politically conditioned act of mediation, translation is not an autonomous cultural act. Translation usually operates 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 notion of the Other and formulate an identity of the source culture. This notion of the Other is recognized by the target culture as representative of the former. It is an authentic specimen of a world that is remote as well as inaccessible in terms of the self of the target culture. In the context of the dialectic between source culture and the target culture, translation becomes a representation of the Other. So, translating the Orient is in fact the translation of the Other, as Theo Hermans observes (2006:7). Thus, every translation is a political project based on Othering.

Translation involves different kinds of the Other: race, gender, class and so on. Class, for instance, is an Other in translation. According to Marx, cultural artifacts are related to particular class groups. They are considered commodities largely designed to reinforce the interests of the controlling or privileged class group like the middle class or bourgeoisie. They are so designed to articulate a view of the world which helps them to promote the interests of the class that produces them. In this context, Gramsci observes:

The supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as ‘domination’ and as ‘intellectual and moral leadership’....It seems clear...that there can, and indeed must be, hegemonic
activity even before the rise to power, and that one should not
count only on the material force which power gives in order to
exercise an effective leadership.(1971:57)

Gramsci means that social domination and intellectual or moral leadership are
two manifestations of power.

English appeared as a subject in the curriculum of the colonies long
before it was institutionalized in the home country. The curriculum was
conceived not in the perennialist sense of an objectively, essentialized entity,
but rather as a discourse, or activity, or process, as one of the mechanisms
through which knowledge could be socially distributed and culturally validated.
Terry Eagleton links the prominence of English in the Commonwealth to
working class education and women’s education. The history of education in
British India shows that certain humanistic functions traditionally associated
with literature like the shaping of character or the development of aesthetic
sense or the discipline of ethical thinking, were considered essential to the
processes of socio-political control by the guardians of the same tradition.
The imperialist intervention in education transformed literature from a
civilizing agent into a political tool of segregation and oppression.

This transformation of literature from its ambivalent amorphous state
into an instrument of ideology is appropriately explained by Terry Eagleton:

A vital instrument for the insertion of individuals into the
perpetual and symbolic forms of the dominant ideological
formation….What is finally at stake is not literary texts but
Literature—the ideological significance of that process whereby certain historical texts are severed from their social formations, defined as “literature” and bound and ranked together to constitute a series of “literary traditions” and interrogated to yield a set of ideological presupposed responses. (1978:57)

Literary canons have been created not merely for British students. The target groups were primarily the students of the colonies. This can be easily understood by the criticism of Samuel Johnson who has been considered the symbol of the traditional canons of English literature. In Johnson’s Lives, one can see how the eccentricities and idiosyncrasies of a literary giant passed off as canons of literatures. This has a political dimension. English has been a tool of colonial project and most of the English writers have been supporters of colonization. The construction of cannon also reveals the dynamics of power relation that exists between the educator and the educated. It brings to the forefront the idea that any verbal act is a form of representation; no analysis of reality can ever be devoid of ideological content as long as it is encoded in language. There is always a “politics of signification” involved in this. The reality is understood as a result or effect of how things have been signified, but the specific representations of reality are recognized as obvious. The circle closes, as this recognition effectively validates the representation. Stuart Hall explains the system of representation and recognition:

But this recognition effect was not a recognition of the reality behind the words, but a sort of confirmation of the obviousness,
the taken-for-grantedness of the way the discourse was organized and of the underlying premises on which the statement in fact depended. If one regards the laws of a capitalist economy as fixed and immutable, then its notions acquire a natural inevitability. Any statement which is so embedded will thus appear to be merely a statement about ‘how things really are. Discourse, in short, had the effect of sustaining certain ‘closures’, of establishing certain systems of equivalence between what could be assumed about the world and what could be said to be true. ‘True’ means credible, or at least capable of winning credibility as a statement of fact. New, problematic or troubling events, which breached the taken-for-granted expectancies about how the world should be, could then be ‘explained’ by extending to them the forms of explanation which had served ‘for all practical purposes’, in other cases. In this sense, Althusser was subsequently to argue that ideology, as opposed to science, moved constantly within a closed circle, producing, not knowledge, but recognition of things we already knew. It did so because it took as an already established fact exactly the premises which ought to have been put in question. (1982:75)

This power of representation creates “false consciousness” which allows people to represent and understand themselves in ways which are determined by the economic power relations existing in the society. This method of
legitimizing the power of the ruling class in society is called the power ideology, which has the capacity to distort and even invert the actual historical conditions.

English assumes a paradoxical position as a discourse in the colonial expansion or imperial intervention: English is at once a colonialist discourse and a nationalist discourse. The writers of the empire used English as a medium supporting the power structures of the empire. The Western educated, English educated writers of the colonies used English as a medium for nationalist resistance to colonial oppression. The colonialist discourse was derived by the writers of the colonies and appropriated it for alternative political ends. So the nationalist discourse is a kind of derivative discourse. The position of English as a political tool for colonialist projects as well as nationalist projects reveals the intricate relations between power and knowledge. It is also related to the concept of a nation or construction of geography. Constructing an imaginative geography consolidates a physical geography. Even the concept of India as a “nation” is a contribution of the empire. This is supported by James Mill’s narrative history, *History of British India*. It endorses the view that culture and power are interrelated: they can be represented in identically structured paradigms.

The history of British rule is to be read in the light of the construction of ideology. A great deal of strategic maneuvering went into the creation of a blue-print for social control in the guise of a humanistic programme of Enlightenment. The British educational measures showed their attempts for an
uncontested superiority and strength. At one level, the representation of Indians as morally and intellectually deficient provided the ameliorative motive and self-righteous justification for colonial intervention. But at another level, the same system of representation, depicting the natives as irrational, inscrutable, unstable and volatile, doomed British rulers to inhabit an imagined, dreaded world of imminent rebellion and resistance. Thus, the colonized subject is a construct emanating from the colonizer’s unconscious.

Orientalism was adopted as an official policy of the empire partly out of expediency and caution, and partly out of an emerged political sense that an efficient Indian administration rested on an understanding of Indian culture. The distance between the British rulers and the Indian subjects was perceived as too vast to bridge. This evoked an undesirable sentiment as stated in Adam’s Reports on Vernacular Education in Bengal and Bihar in 1835 and in 1838: “we rule over them and traffic with them, but they do not understand our character, and we do not penetrate theirs. The consequence is that we have no hold on their sympathies, no seat in their affections” (340). Therefore, the exhaustive researches conducted by the Orientalists like William Jones, Nathaniel Halhed, Henry.T.Colebrooke and Charles Wilkins had ambitious goals. Beneath the transparency of their exhaustive inquiries, their immense scholarly achievements and discoveries, lay interests that were far from scholarly. Knowledge derived from the experiences, culture and art of the colonized could be used to dominate and enslave them. Such knowledge could fortify the power structures of the empire: “Every accumulation of knowledge,
and especially such as is obtained by social communication with people over whom we exercise a dominion founded on the light of conquest, is useful to the state: it is the gain of humanity”(Kopf,1969:18). This argument is an overt and unabashed rationalization of the dialectic of information and control. For the colonizer, it was not merely that the empire had a vital interest in the production of knowledge about those whom it ruled or colonized. More important, it also had a role in actively processing and then selectively delivering that knowledge to mankind in the guise of objective knowledge. This is in fact an appropriation of knowledge and a misrepresentation of the culture and experiences of the colonized.

The dynamics of Indian modernization was set in motion by British Orientalism. Orientalism succeeded in introducing European civilization to regional elite in India. It helped in the formation of Indian middle class. It promoted education, printing and publishing, journalism and modern science including medicine. Orientalism cultivated a new sense of nationalism and identity in the Indians. It also modernized communication systems and travel. Orientalism transformed all fields of human activity in India. It historicized and unified Indian past and consolidated the topography of India as a unified country:

The Orientalists served as avenues linking the regional elite with the dynamic civilization of contemporary Europe. They contributed to the formation of a new Indian middle class and assisted in the professionalization of the Bengali intelligentsia.
They started schools, systematized languages, brought printing and publishing to India, and encouraged the proliferation of books, journals, newspapers, and other media of communication. Their impact was urban and secular. They built the first modern scientific labs in India, and taught European medicine. They were neither static classicists nor averse to the idea of progress; and they both historicized the Indian past and stimulated a consciousness history in the Indian intellectual. It was they who transmitted a new sense of identity to Bengalis that enlarged what Robert Bellah has called “the capacity for rational goal setting,” an instrumental process in the development of a modern outlook. (Kopf, 1969:275)

Orientalists projected themselves as having the exalted image of producers of the knowledge that empowered them to conquer, appropriate and manage the whole Asiatic race. But the knowledge they produced was selectively distributed and appropriated to justify the colonial intervention, perpetuate colonial rule and to negate the cultural identity of the colonized Indians through misrepresentation, misinformation and stereotyping.

The primary objective of colonialism was material exploitation through oppression and hegemony. The “services” rendered by the colonizers were in fact a cover for greater exploitation and oppression. The ultimate beneficiaries were the people of the empire. The mentality of British towards Asiatic countries is vehement in the expression:
The primary object of Great Britain, let it be acknowledged, was rather to discover what could be obtained from Asiatic subjects, than how they could be benefited. In process of time it was found expedient to examine how they might be benefited in order that we might continue to hold the advantages which we at first derived from them…. [Their] happiness is committed to our care. (quoted in *Parliamentary Papers, Observations*, 8, 1831-1832: 20)

Orientalism was projected as a mission to revitalize Indian culture, art and systems of knowledge and protect them from the oblivion. The foreign rule was projected as a phase of modernization and civilization of India. These truths merged with the contemporary literary vogue of “Orientalism” and formed the mainstays of that phase of British rule known as the “Orientalist” phase.

The West has always tried to create an image of the East as the Other. This is to confirm the unhindered continuation of the hegemonic structures of disciplinary power. This is evident in what Edward Said speaks in his “Crisis in Orientalism”:

> Orientalism is a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinctions made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident.” Thus a very large mass of writers, among them are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and
political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, “mind,” destiny, and so on. (1978:2-3)

Said presents a compelling and cogent account of a luminescent, rational, Cartesian West, systematically inventing and sustaining a dark pre-rational, exotic Orient to serve as “the Other” against which the topography of a superior and dominating Occident can continuously emerge in sharp contrast with its history and culture.

The ethnographic agenda was evident from the early practices of Orientalist translations. These include Edward Fitzgerald’s translation of Omar Khayyam’s *Rubaiyat*, William Jones’s translation of *Shakuntala* (*Sacontala or The Fatal Ring*), Charles Wilkins’s translation of *The Bhagavat Gita* (*Dialogues between Kreeshna and Arjoon*), and *Manusmriti* (*Menu’s Institutes*) by Jones. Jones emphasized the importance of Oriental Studies and translations to the efficient administration of the British colonies. Translation was marked under the sublime notion of humanistic enterprise of bridging the gap between the peoples or cultures. But it prompted the surfacing of rigid dichotomies between modern and primitive, the West and the non-West, civilized and barbaric, culture and nature. Jones considered translation an ethnographic and ethnocentric project. It is part of the colonial agenda of dehistoricizing the services of oppositions to ethnocentric violence in translation. This dehumanizing move is followed by situating the primitive Orientals in the teleological scheme that shows them to be imperfect realizations of the West.
In his article, *Orientalism* (1978), Said observes that the best way of controlling the Orient is by constructing the Orient as the cultural Other of Europe. He finds Orientalism a discourse that constructs the Orient as the Other of Europe. As translation is akin to an exercise in literary criticism in its function as a form of interpretation, it is a site of ideological manipulation. The mystery and fear that shrouded the Orient necessitated the innovation of a literary discourse that could tame and transpire it. This literary discourse is a synthesis of politics and aesthetics or content and form. Translation is a textual politics: it involves a process of the ideologically right content rendered in aesthetically appropriate realist form. For, the politics of a translator is evident not only in the content but also in the aesthetic form of the text.

The notions of a primitive innocence, of simplicity and naturalness, and of spirituality, become the basic framework of all rewritings of the cultures of India. These are the discursive domains within which the colonized can be safely contained and the colonial mission of civilizing the primitive communities justified. The cultural stereotype of the colonized as childlike, innocent and primitive has been constructed in order to illustrate the need to help them grow up. This is a disguised or oblique attempt to restrict the colonized subject within the discursive space that does not challenge the sophisticated, advanced and civilized cultural values of the West. Orientalist translation is a discursive space that restricts and stereotypes the colonized to accept their subordination.
Edward Said points out the political implications of Orientalism. He considers it a terrain of discourse, which constructs the Orient as the cultural Other of Europe. It is an innovative way of controlling the Orient: constructing the Orient as the Other of Europe. This method of cultural Othering is a kind of politics by other means as Althusser speaks of or politics that does not look like politics as James Scott explains. Said describes the process of negation initiated by the empire:

The journey, the history, the fable, the stereotype, the polemical confrontation…are the lenses through which the Orient is experienced, and they shape the language, perception, and form of the encounter between East and West….Something patently foreign and distant acquires, for one reason or another, a status more rather than less familiar. One tends to stop judging things either as completely novel or as completely well known; a new median category emerges, a category that allows one to see new things, things seen for the first time, as versions of a previously known thing. In essence, such a category is not so much a way of receiving new information as it is a method of controlling what it seems to be a threat to some established view of things….The threat is muted, familiar values impose themselves, and in the end mind reduces
the pressure upon it by accommodating things to itself as either “original” or “repetitious.” (1978:58-59)

The heterogeneity of Indian tradition, society and culture glided over in the rush to appropriate themselves to the pattern of European culture. The Orient got subordinated in the process of Europeanization / westernization.

In order to construct a canon, the European translators often chose certain writers and texts, best suited for the (mis) representation of the Third World in the West. Their over enthusiasm to master the Oriental works showed the objective of political administration. In the political scheme of administration, the British government was expected to function as a paternal protectorate governing India not by direct rule but through various local functionaries. They knew that for the emergence of a new political society, the native tradition and culture should be viewed as vital in providing the soil for growth. The Orientalist translations helped in securing and reinforcing the indirect British control over India. They attempted to condition and govern the Indian society through the methods of indirect cultural politics.

Translation is a cultural act involving mediation at different levels. In this context, Sachdananda Mahanty remarks in “Insider/ Outsider: A Definition of Translation”: “All acts of translation are an attempt to mediate between cultures, texts and nationalities” (Mukherjee, 1998: 102). Translation has played an active role in the colonization process and in popularizing an ideologically motivated image of the colonized. The colony was seen as an imitative and inferior translational copy of Europe. The submerged identity of
the colony was overwritten by itself in an attempt of retrieval. The dissemination of such ideologically conditioned images has made Bassnett and Trivedi to refer to the “shameful history of translation” (1999: 5). In this context, translation can be used to subvert identity. Only a rewriting can retrieve the identity, lost or erazed.

English translations of the Eastern classics have been used by the British empire to construct a rewritten image of the East that has come to stand for the truth. This makes Tejaswini NIRANJANA to present the postcolonial as “still scored through by an absentee colonialism” (1992:8). The evangelists who ran schools for the colonized and who performed the roles of linguists and translators, the ethnographers who recorded the grammar of the native language, and the Orientalists who studied and translated the Oriental texts participated in the enormous project of collection and codification of data on which colonial power was based. NIRANJANA specifically attacks the role of translation within the power structure. She regards literary translation as one of the discourses which “inform the hegemonic apparatuses that belong to the ideological structure of the colonial rule” (1992:33). Though literary translation appears to be a beneficial creative act, it can implicitly harbour any kind of ethnographic agenda that can turn out to be hegemonic or inimical to the cultural identity of the colonized.

Along with education, translation was used as a covert politics to tame the colonized Indian subjects. The British rulers projected these strategies as services rendered to the subjects and highlighted them as part of their civilizing
mission. But, in fact they were appropriated and institutionalized to strengthen the imperial power structures. That is the reason why Tejaswini Niranjana calls translation a significant technology of colonial domination. She argues: “By employing certain modes of representing the Other which it thereby also [brought] into being translation reinforce[d] hegemonic versions of the colonized, helping them to acquire the status of what Edward Said calls representation or objects without history” (1992:774). The mission of translation is to purify the debased native texts. The British believed that Indians should be governed by their own laws. But, they also felt that “these laws had first to be taken away from them [Indians] and ‘translated’ before they could benefit from them” (1992:775). The laws or codes were written in Sanskrit, and only the Brahmins were entitled and competent to interpret them. So the laws were interpreted to the disadvantage of others who formed the majority of the population. Eric Cheyfitz also echoes exactly the same idea as expressed by Tejaswini: “…the problems of translation, the complex interactions between cultures and histories” are evaded to produce translations of “what were necessarily difficulties, discords, indeed absences of translation, [that were] displaced into fictive accords of communication, composed, except for a scattering of transliterated native tongues, wholly in European terms” (1991:6). The transliteration in European languages was a form of homogenization that depoliticized the ideological / political aspects of nationalist discourses.
Translation is related to culture and marginality on the one hand and an organized and forced replacement of linguistic and cultural material on the other. What Roman Jakobson comments on poetry are applicable to translation also: “an organized violence committed on language.” Translation, as a representation, depends on the structures of culture and texts that pre-exist in the target language. The reception of a translated text depends on the hierarchical power structures constituted or configured in the text. In this context, Lawrence Venuti explains:

The violence of translation resides in its very purpose and activity: the reconstitution of the foreign text in accordance with values, beliefs and representations that pre-exist it in the target language, always configured in hierarchies of dominance and marginality, always determining the production, circulation, and reception of texts. Translation is the forcible replacement of the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text with a text that will be intelligible to the target-language reader. (1993:209)

He means that structures of the translated text and the power structures that constitute the social hierarchy are analogous: they explain their existence through identically configured paradigms.

With the spread of English education, a false value-structure emerged in India. In this value structure everything British was considered inherently good. This value-structure was implemented and supported by the politics of translational activity. The most obvious consequences of this colonial value
scheme were an indiscriminate institutionalization of English literature. It also resulted in a proliferation of translation with a value politics favourable to the British. In this regard, G.N.Devy points out in his essay, “Translation Theory: An Indian Perspective”:

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

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

Bernard Cohn sees translation as a trope for the cultural encounter, and points out the attempted appropriation of Indian culture by the British in colonial times:

The production of these texts [i.e., studies of Indian languages and translations from them] began the establishment of discursive formation, defined an epistemological space, created a discourse. (Orientalism), and had the effect of converting Indian form of knowledge into European objects …. The languages that the Indians speak and read were to be transformed. The discursive formation was to participate in the creation and reification of social groups with their varied interests. It was to establish and
regularize a discourse of differentiations that came to mark the social and political map of nineteenth century India. (1997:53)

Cohn defines translation as an epistemological space related to the formation of discourses and social/cultural groups. Translation became a discourse of differentiation to the interests of various groups and identities. No translation is culturally neutral; it is hegemonic, both culturally and politically.

The Western educated Indians naturalized the Eurocentric modes of representation, translation or narrative. They realized that a symbolic power or authority is attached to the English language. This made them to seek access to their history and culture circulated through the colonial discourse of English. In this process, they not only neglected their mother tongue but also unconsciously received many Orientalist images of their culture which later proved to be lethal to their cultural identity or sense of community. The far-reaching consequences of the violence committed through the colonial project of translations are pointed out by Tejaswini Nirajana:

European translations of Indian texts prepared for a Western audience provided to the ‘educated’ Indian a whole range of Orientalist images. Even when the Anglicized Indian spoke a language other than English, ‘he’ would have preferred, because of the symbolic power attached to English, to gain access to his own past through translations and histories circulating through colonial discourse. English education also familiarized the Indian
with ways of seeing, techniques of translation, or modes of representation that came to be accepted as “natural.” (1992:778)

Translation is an activity that makes cross-cultural power relations more visible. But, these power relations follow a state of perennial inequality in terms of domination and subordination. The dominance of European languages symbolically represents the enforced dominance of the European imperialism.

Translation is not a simple, innocuous linguistic activity. It is a political act capable of appropriation distortion, manipulation or misrepresentation. Mahasweta Sengupta in her essay “Translation as Manipulation,” recognizes this potential:

While choosing texts for rewriting, the dominant power appropriated those texts that conform to the pre-existing discursive parameters of its linguistic networks. These texts are then rewritten largely according to a certain pattern that denudes them of their complexity and variety; they are presented as specimens of a culture that is ‘simple’, ‘natural’ and, in the case of India, ‘otherworldly’ or ‘spiritual’ as well. (Dingwaney and Maier, 1996:160)

Such renditions clearly justify the colonizer’s civilizing mission through which the inherent superiority of the colonizer’s culture is established. The rewriting always involves manipulations and simplifications for the sake of gaining recognition in and by the metropolis. The discursive parameters of the dominant power structures are such that they restrict the entry of texts that do
not fit into their idea of the cultural Other. The result of such a process of exclusion is that the source culture is homogenized and domesticated by the dominant culture. The polyphony of its existence is obliterated and a unified monolithic view of that culture is created as truly legitimate. But, Homi K. Bhabha expresses a different view: “Cultural translation is not simply appropriation or adaptation; it is a process through which cultures are required to revise their own systems and values, departing from their habitual or ‘inbred rules of transformation. Ambivalence and antagonism accompany any act of cultural transformation, because negotiating with the difference of the other’ reveals the radical insufficiency of our own systems of meaning and significance” (1997:14). Bhabha connects translation to cultural transformation; it is a process of revision of values in negotiation with the cultural Other. He observes that translation expresses the inadequacy of our systems of simplification.

The Europeans restructured the Orient by their art and made its colours, lights, and people visible through their images, rhythms, and motifs. They tried to show that European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a surrogate and even underground self. In this context, Said explains:

Orientalism stands forth and away from the Orient: that Orientalism makes sense at all depends more on the West than on the Orient, and this sense is directly indebted to various Western techniques of representation that make the Orient visible, clear,
“there” in discourse about it. And these representations rely upon institutions, traditions, conventions, agreed-upon codes of understanding for their effects, not upon a distant and amorphous Orient. (1978:22)

Thus the nexus of knowledge and power created the Orient. The knowledge was selective and the power was disciplinary. A sinister configuration of epistemological and power structures selected and restricted by the concept of the Other constructed the Orient. The Westerners are presented as different from the people of the Orient. Unlike the Orientals, they are rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, and capable of holding real values, without suspicion. A Westerner, as Said observes,

…makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its 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. (1978:21)

Said here points out that the Orientalist is both the producer and product of translation. He is an outsider who constructs texts as an insider.

Many official documents of the British rule presented the Indians in poor light; they were pictured as depraved, dehumanized and unsophisticated, indulging in human vices. Tweedale’s minute was an instance. The Marquess of Tweedale, Governor and Commander in chief of Madras from 1842 to 1848,
found the Hindus and Muslims as having common characteristics like-immorality, sensuality, self-indulgence, corruption and depravity- which he identified as inimical to the society and, therefore, must be controlled. The minute he issued in 1846 said that those “living in the dark recesses of our great cities at home, from the state of degradation consequent on their vicious and depraved habits, the offspring of ignorance and sensual indulgence,” and the elevation of the Hindus and the Muslims, whose “ignorance and degradation” required a remedy not adequately supplied by their respective faiths (1846, 29:190). By doing so, they were supposed to be giving instruction “useful to the State.” India was conceived as a land so wonderfully contagious and so congenial to the worst qualities of human nature. They believed that in such a condition, a long term rule is guaranteed by the creation of an image of the English nation as having been “formed by superior lights and juster principles and possessed of higher energies” (quoted in Parliamentary Papers, Observations, 8, 1831-1832: 10). The negative images of the Indians were contrasted with the positive images of the English. This was extended to a contrast of principles on which the societies evolve in India and England.

Inspite of the negative images popularized in and accepted by the West, some British citizens were sympathetic to Indian culture and languages. They felt that study of indigenous language and culture should be promoted, at least for the value of information. John Tytler’s letter to T.B.Macaulay is a classic illustration:

If we destroy it [Oriental studies] we shall degrade both ourselves and the people we undertake to improve. A history of
the successive systems of Science and philosophy, though it may not teach the true nature of things, will yet afford much valuable information of another kind. It will teach what mankind have thought and how they have reasoned about these things and the successive steps by which they have arrived at Truth. It is in short the history of human opinions and this is at least as important as that of human actions. (1835:425)

It is doubtful whether this observation had influenced Macaulay’s Minutes. Some Europeans found an evangelist objective in the study of the Orient. They acknowledge the fact that knowledge of oriental literature involved far more goals than reading and translating of the texts. In this context, a writer for the Asiatic Journal observes:

Being ill-acquainted with the language of the people, and unable to read the Alcoran in the original, [the missionaries] often attack imaginary doctrines and creeds which the Mahommedans do not profess. The Alcoran, it is admitted, includes absurd, puerile and immoral dogmas, but the teachers of Islamism, in their glosses and commentaries, contrive to palliate these ridiculous passages and render them plausible by some explanation. These explications the missionaries ought carefully to study, that he may direct his refutation to them. This requires a profound acquaintance with the Arabic tongue,
which the majority of these travellers despise. (quoted in Gauri Viswanathan, 1989: 106)

So the study of the Orient was a multipurpose project. But all the purposes were based on a monolithic view that Europe was culturally and intellectually superior to the Orient.

Translation is a powerful political tool. It is a means to appropriate power to one’s advantage. The translations of Bible were no mere literary defiance. The Bible translation is a metaphor of subverting religious hegemony. It was an oblique attempt to challenge the hierarchy of the Church. Such attempts can also be found in Indian tradition. The Bhakti movement poetry evolved from the desire of translating the language of spirituality from Sanskrit, the language of the elite, to the vernaculars, the language of the people. It is a kind of carnivalesque of language. The English Orientalist scholars initially familiarized the West with what they regarded as the treasures of the “East.” Their conscious effort was to retrieve a “golden age” of the Indian past that existed before the medieval period and the coming of the Islamic rulers to the subcontinent. The foremost scholar who located and translated the literature of the Orient was William Jones. Working from the premise of cultural superiority and faith in the advanced nature of European civilization, Jones divided the world into two spheres, Europe and Asia: “reason and taste [were] the grand prerogatives of the European minds,” whereas the “Asiatics soared to loftier heights in the sphere of imagination” (1807, 3:12).
He meant that the Europeans were rational and cultured while the Asians were imaginative and impulsive.

Jones believed in the Enlightenment notion of the two faculties of the human mind. He was happy to concede to the “Asiatic” the domain of the imaginative and exotic because it did not fit into the Cartesian world of rational discourse. Jones thought, as Said explains: “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). The Orient was a romanticized concept, a construct of imagination often fantasy. While translating Jayadeva’s *Gitagovinda*, Jones stated his ideological inclinations:

> After having translated the *Gitagovinda* word for word, I reduced my translation to the form, in which it is now exhibited; omitting only those passages which are too luxuriant and too bold of an [sic] European taste, and the preparatory ode on the ten incarnations of Vishnu, with which you have been presented on another occasion: the phrases in *Italicks* are the *burdens* of the several songs; and you may be assured, that not a single image or idea has been added by the translator. (1807, 7:115)

The translation was obviously for European consumption. Translation often makes the colonial world an object of consumption, exotic but not foreign. Even though he declared that he had not added any single new image, he had
certainly denuded the original of its richness and variety in order to make it appeal to the European taste.

The images of India that came through the Orientalist translations were quite consistent with the colonialist agenda of maintaining superiority. They perfectly agree with the image that Macaulay portrayed in his *Minute on Indian Education* (1835):

I have no knowledge of either Sanscrit or Arabic. But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit works. I have conversed both here and at home with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I am quite ready to take the Oriental learning at the valuation of the Orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native culture of India and Arabia.

It will hardly be disputed, I suppose, that the department of literature in which the Eastern writers stand highest is poetry. And I certainly never met with any Orientalist who ventured to maintain that the Arabic and Sanscrit poetry could be compared to that of the great European nations. But, when we pass from works of imagination to works in which facts are recorded and general principles investigated, the superiority of the Europeans becomes absolutely immeasurable. It is, I believe, no
exaggeration to say that all historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanscrit language is less valuable than what may be found in most paltry abridgements used at preparatory schools in England. (quoted in Dingwaney and Maier, 1996:164)

The political and hegemonic agenda of translation is evident when Macaulay specifically insisted that he gained the estimation by reading translations. Macaulay totally ruled out the possibility of any comparison between the European and Indian. Ignorant, yet arrogant, this reading represented the image of India from the position of colonial power, which even the passage of time could not alter.

The auto translations of Tagore in English, clearly shows the hegemonic power of the images that existed in the discourse of the English language. Though he was an innovator and pioneer of modern Bengali literature, he presented a very different facet of himself in his translations. He appropriated the translations of his poem to suit the prevailing notions of the “poet-prophet” of the East. In doing so he succumbed to the hegemonic power of the images, constructed and perpetuated in Orientalist translations (Mukherjee, 1994:107). In translations, he appropriated his creative genius to suit the sensibility of the Western readers.

Translation of Indian culture was used to further the British techniques of indirect rule. Niranjana points out that Orientalist and ethnographic images helped to legitimize colonialism. This was done by the translator’s refusal to
discuss how Europe had imposed its power and its conception of a just political order (1992:78). The colonial discourse of translation reproduced the colonial divide in an inverted form: a colonial “us” interpreting and representing a colonized “them.” This process of using translation as a medium of power operates in the postcolonial space where the colonized “them” gets shifted to the categories determined by race, class, caste and gender.

The politics of translation is closely connected to the politics involved in the prominence acquired by English Studies in the Commonwealth. The paradoxical position of English in the colonies is resolved through politically designed literary histories. The homogenized literary histories published by the grey tiled Universities in Briton erased the difference between the authors of the empire and the English writers of the colonies. This was a deliberate attempt to unify the cultural identities of the colonizers and the colonized. It provoked Stephen Greenblatt to consider such types of literary history mixed and impure where the voices of the victorious and the vanquished are put together. But, it was a colonizer’s strategy to neutralize the political weight of nationalist writings and to ignore the elements of resistance in them. The colonizers deliberately ignored the difference and created a false impression that they were accommodative and reconciling.

Language is one of the means of classifying and ordering the world. Language is at once a means of representing and appropriating reality. Linguistic structures bring out a realistic world, which if inaccurate, leads to misunderstanding. If the rules which underlie the language system or symbolic
order are invalid, the audiences are continually deceived. This is related to the
construction of meaning. In this regard, Gayatri Chakravorthy Spivak remarks
in “The Politics of Translation”: “The politics of translation takes on a massive
life of its own if you see language as the process of meaning construction”
The power to encode and decode the language makes a phatic divide: the
dominant group occupies the pivotal position whereas the marginalized groups
are kept under a panoptic surveillance as the captives of the discourse they fail
to decode.

Translation becomes a means of creating Otherness, be it cultural,
ethnographic or sexual. In this regard, Spivak observes:

In the act of wholesale translation into English there can be the
betrayal of the democratic ideal, into the law of the strongest.
This happens when all the literature of the Third World gets
translated into a sort of with-it translatese, so that literature by a
woman in Palestine begins to resemble, in the feel of its prose,
something by a man in Taiwan. The rhetoricity of Shinese and
Arabic! The cultural politics of high-growth, capitalist Asia-
Pacific, and devastated West Asia! Gender difference inscribed
and inscribing these differences. (Venuti, 2000:98)

Spivak is concerned about the ideological consequences of the translations of
Third World literature into English and the distortion it entails.
Translation is primarily a creative act carried out through the medium of language. It is not a passive or neutral medium that allows an experience to be represented neutrally. The reality represented by language is a language specific reality. It creates epistemological structures with ideological gravity. As an act of homogenization, translation can depoliticize the political content or the experience represented in the text. Any translation should overcome or subvert the innate nature of depoliticization associated with the linguistic medium of translation.