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Articles

Why Always Translate a Sufferer? : The Consequences of Mimetic Translations of Mahasweta Devi's Works

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Abstract: The enormous literary output of Indian female writers serves to emphasize the free flow of cognition – with which they are approaching the epistemology of past and present, and is categorizing the 'possible' future. The enigma of the whole corpus of female writing, it seems is predominated by the suffering portrayal of an 'often' female protagonist. Either suppressed under the domestic audacity, or binarized in the social plane, or is being fragmented in the cultural sphere. Translations of indigenous female writers (into English) in this respect not only open up a horizon of readership, but can also provide a pluralistic approach towards successful portrayal of femininity (along with the suffering one). However, the empirical observation suggests that the cultural consumption of a 'female protagonist' is signified with the 'suffering', 'subjugated', 'oppressed', 'categorized', 'binarized', 'mutilated' (among others) signifiers. Thereby, the number of translations carried out either by the popular female writers, or by the popular translating 'persona' – always presents the 'picture' of a secondary woman in a primary male society. Does this entail that females cannot be successful otherwise, without being exploited at the hands of male superiority? By applying the mimetic theories of Girard in the translated works of Mahasweta Devi's, this paper proposes to analyse the ideology of translating an inferior protagonist. The resultant work does not only invoke a sense of 'pity' or 'awareness' in the reader, but also categorizes him/her into accepting the plights of women as just, and female success can always be achieved by being 'secondary' in importance.

Keywords: Mimetic Ideology, Semantic Memory, Receptor's Cognition, Consent Generation, Mentalese Communication.

Introduction: The Ideology of Plight Configuration

The promulgation of contemporary feminine discourses serves to emphasize the growing number of readerships with a stimulus of female 'cause'. The author/ authoress's creation of a female 'protagonist' (either real or fictionalised), therefore, is successfully invoking the sense of catharsis hitherto been desired by the reader. The penetrating nature of these 'popular' discourses is questioning the essence of what a 'human' is and what is 'humanity'? However, even though at the surface level they are preaching a different form of alternative; at the 'base' they form a homogenous construct – the portraiture of a 'sufferer'. Uniquely enough this suffering protagonist is a female – oppressed, a victim at the hands of societal binarism(s), and is confronting the societal repressive mechanisms with an aura of revolt. Paradoxically enough all the surviving popular literature about a female sufferer follows this paradigm.

They claim that, "oppressed groups enjoyed privileged 'epistemologies' or 'different ways of knowing' that better enable them to understand the world, not only socially but scientifically"(Sommers 74). Therefore, Ismat Chugtai's Lifting the Veil is a brimming discourse about a Muslim woman's plight against patriarchal norms. Or, the autobiographical mode of narration in My Story by Kamala Das successfully invokes the sense of pity in the reader. Perhaps due to their unique portraiture of narrative persona, these authors upon public exposure came to be signified with their 'genre of production'. For instance, as Ismat Chugtai's "stories, indeed, are a reflection of her society...and she has remarkably depicted the social and emotional explication and the consequent deprivation of women...to call her asocial critic will not be wrong. She holds a unique place because of her boldness and truthfulness" (Kiran 53). In the same veil, Kamala Das's writing had been branded as "intimate, confessional and innovative...It is the unfulfilled dreams of the poet, which in turn shape the erotic themes of her poems. Her poems show a strong sense of consciousness towards female psyche...which is viewed by her in two aspects: male body and female body" (Fatima 62). Arriving with this denotative aspect of Das's writing as intimate, confessional and innovative, the subsequent criticisms delineates into how she viewed the male part with contempt and, how about her female part she is not sure, but accepts it nonetheless. The question then poses itself, during the possess of the creation (of a repressive expression) did the authors themselves decided their denotative mode of narration, or is it just for the sake of being 'accepted' into the societal format, that the works themselves have transformed? What then about the reader? Is it just an arbitrary fact that when one (female primarily) suffers from a societal oppression (within Muslim community) for her the works of Ismat Chugtai appears just; and for another sufferer, victim of bodily oppression (physical or sexual) for her the works of Kamal Das's provide solace?

In addition, having identified the 'victim' and after the clear demarcation of what has contributed to the victimization, the narrative of these discourses propels to signify the sufferer as an iconic figure, a sort of representative for a whole supposedly oppressed race. For this, they identify the 'people' (progressively males, and seldom female), who have wronged 'her'; and justify how in doing so they have wronged the entire female race in general. Kamala Bhasin in her work Understanding Gender(2003) have identified this fact. By re-illuminating a fresh approach towards sex and gender with traditional normativity – she has demarcated between men and women: "If a woman can cook, so can a man, because a woman doesn't cook with her womb! What follows from this is that the different status women and men enjoy in society is indeed socially and culturally determined. Everywhere women as a group are considered inferior to men"(5). Even though feminine discourses often employ the distributive adjectives like 'everywhere', 'everyone', to stress on their universalization of suffering; and though at the same time, they are being critically acclaimed for their conceptions by the readers; the notions expressed two centuries before are still the mode of expression in

contemporary scenario. Even though a reader (upon exposure with these texts) becomes conscious with the mechanism(s) of oppression: why then the traditional oppressions (through new approach) still prevalent? As Bhasin herself has observed:

Every society prescribes different norms for girls and boys, women and men, which determine almost every aspect of their lives and their futures…However, the degree of differentiation between male and female roles varies widely. Sometimes the rules are merely preferential, and very little anxiety is shown by either sex over temporary role reversals (pp 6-7).

If this paradigm is true, then the entire corpus of popular feminine authors, in their zeal of authoritative creation have surrendered to a fundamental prerogative – they are no longer opting for an 'objective' mode of expression, rather it is the enigma of being 'popular' that is clouding their portraiture.

From this conjecture, it can be augmented that the voices which once preached (in negative way) the binarisms of social and sexual, public and private, oppression(s) and instruments of oppressions – have now become a cultural mode of production.Most importantly, though, it is not the authors who are in control of this cultural mode of production. Nowhere is this more evident than within the corpus of female writing. Targeted primarily towards writers who seeks or is seeking a public exposure – the cultural mechanics destroys the polysemic implications of their texts, and disfigured it into a commercial one. This fact is not a contemporary one; during the course of writing (the process of creating an authentic, undiluted text) Simone de Beauvoir had observed the same anti- mechanics of a public exposure: "I have hesitated to write a book on women. The subject is irritating, especially to women. Enough ink has been spilled in quarrelling over feminism…however, for the voluminous nonsense uttered during the last century seems to have done little to illuminate the problem" (Beauvoir 53). Once her authentic French version has entered the critical academia, it gave away its complexities of narration – and when the translation of it is done into English, with the purpose of approaching a wide populace, it has become an 'edible product'. Therefore any mode of critical production fades in its attempt to approach a wider spectrum of society. Perhaps "if women lived in a different country from men, and had never read any of their writings, they would have a literature of their own…but for that much longer time is necessary, than has yet elapsed, before it can emancipate itself from the influence of accepted models" (Mills 83).

As Mills alternative is not a feasible one, the single most option left for the writers – is to exist in a coherence. But, in order to be coherent, the authorial creation runs the risk of becoming a victim of ingenious cultural probation. It is not the authors alone, who suffer this paralogical distribution – the readers, the distinguished consumers of the invented texts, too become subjectified in the process. Astonishingly enough, the 'cultural probation' is not politicizing the contents of the texts. They have realised that the market policy of demand runs parallel with the assumption of 'exposure' – the higher the exposed fact, the greater the

consumption. They only seek to morph the appeal of the authorial text, and in doing so access the unconscious motifs of the reader. Even though the reader explains oneself to be a conscious acceptor of exogamic stimulus, but when judged from this background of cultural probation – the entire process becomes rudimentary. Thus, no matter the structure of an authenticated suffering text, it fails to produce its intended effect; and even if it does, the generated reaction (from the self-proclaimed conscious readers) too parallels the intended effect of the cultural mode. In this respect, if the reader's reaction is customized, then the mere pretension of whether or not the intended work will generate the conformity from the reader is an invalid assumption. The stomata of cultural appropriation would never filter a text without any discursive appeal, in the same way it would never expose a reader's observation which runs against the proposed course of action. In this spectrum, "something is provided for everyone so that no one can escape: differences are hammered home and propagated" (Horkheimer& Adorno 97).

The Cultural Appropriation of Mahasweta Devi's:

This is the fissure which lurks behind the translated works of Mahasweta Devi. In the field of literary acclamation, she has introduced a paradigmatic shift of subject matter. In her works "she has dealt with the plight of women and their subordination" (Sheeba 310). Coming away from sophisticated diction, her Bengali works feature common language of expressions. She is "probably the most widely translated Indian writer working in an indigenous language...She has taken up the case of tribal people in India through political activism and writing" (Salgado 131). However, "her material is not written with an international audience in mind" (Spivak 105). Thereby, while her Bengali works are the evidences of polysemy; upon translation they become homonymy – a fixed denotation.

G.C. What do you think about Spivak's translations [of your work]?

M.D. I think she is the best. As far as I am concerned, as far as my stories are concerned, she's the best. Then comes Samik Bandyopadhyay...

G.C. My feeling is that sometimes when she is translating one of your stories, for example "Draupadi", in In Other Worlds, she incorporates it in her book and she writes a very long...

M.D. Dissertation.

G.C. Yes, which is very long and unclear, and then comes your story, and my feeling when I see that is that she's appropriated it, she's taken your story, she's made it her own.

M.D. No, all her translations are extremely faithful. Absolutely. Gayatri does not distort, not even one word...

G.C. In North America, the book Imaginary Maps is marketed under Spivak's name.

M.D. Yes, she has translated it.

G.C. Yes, I know but these are your stories. (Speaking with Mahasweta Devi 143)

Whereas her Bengali works are limited within the periphery of a Bengali populace, her translated works (not translated by her own) have received a wider circulation of popularity. Even though her subject matter of tribal plight is not widely known, due to the filtration of the content (from Bengali to English), her works have acquired an aroma of 'appeal'. This is what distinguishes her works, and at the same time diminishes their pluralism. Even though the narrative structure and the narrative itself run parallel in both the medium of expressions – her Bengali works (original authorial creation) are not primarily evocative. Though they preach the plights of a sufferer, this suffering denies any subjective association between the text (or the persona) and the reader. Due to this objective standpoint, the reader remains conscious about the discursive elements, and can enumerate the implied essence of the text. However, this standpoint becomes completely opposite, when dealing with the translated texts. Filtered through the cultural lenses, the primary target of these texts is to generate a symbiosis between the reader, and the text. For which the translated texts have been inscripted with a mediated desire.

> *The exercise of writing an 'introduction' (which serves the same functionalism as a preface) is an attempt at saturation of this desire. Translated by Spivak, the preface of Of Grammatology argues,*
>
> *the preface is a necessary gesture of homage and parricide, for the book makes a claim of authority or origin which is both true and false...Humankind's common desire is for a stable centre, and for the assurance of mastery through knowing or possessing. And a book, with its ponderable shape and its beginning, middle, and, an end stands to satisfy that desire (xi).*

A self-moving activity, the introduction of the Breast Stories surrenders to this cultural structure of argumentation: "the breast is not a symbol in these stories. In 'Draupadi', what is represented is an erotic object transformed into an object of torture and revenge. In 'Breast Giver', it is a survival object transformed into a commodity" (Spivak vii). Therefore, the main functionalism of an introduction (if it is not stemming from the authorial pen) is to obscure the semantic memory of the reader – to stop the free flow of textual elements and to narrow it down to a false knowing of the subject matter. This legibility become seven more complicated given the fact that Mahasweta Devi is not primarily a writer but an activist; and her writing serves as an extension to her activism. In this respect, her "prolific output in the form of novels and short stories are mostly historiographies, rehabilitated folklore, political allegories – stepped in local conditions, traditions, dialects and customs, which need to be understood keeping in view her social activism in its totality" (Dar 100).

Activists like herself, Mahasweta Devi's Bengali works are essentially a structure of multi- layered knowing. It's an activity, where the reader moves between consciousness and reality, and deciphers the gestures and abstractions. The translated texts, on the other hand borders on meaning- text momentum with no authorial plurality. In the opening of Breast Giver, Jashoda was thus introduced as the embodiment of Indian motherhood: "Jashoda doesn't remember if her aunt was kind or unkind.

It is as if she were Kangalicharan's wife from birth, the mother of twenty children, living or dead, counted on her fingers" (Devi, "Breast Giver" 39); and in the opening of Draupadi, Dopdi was introduced as an anti-personality to be persecuted: "Name Dopdi Mehen, age twenty seven, husband Dulna Majhi (deceased) domicile Cherakhan, Bankrahjarh, infor-mation whether dead or alive and/or assistance in arrest, one hundred rupees...most notorious female. Long wanted in many" (Devi, "Draupadi" 19). The narratives progress from there, developing into a culmination of a price that 'motherhood' has to pay or 'body' has to suffer. Behind this view of a 'suffering' portraiture the mechanism is to transfer the message adequately. "The system works 'well' if the message received by the addressee is wholly identical to the one dispatched by the addresser (translator), and it works 'badly' if there are differences between the texts" (Lotman 12). These differences can function as discursive 'errors' (as in Jashoda's sympathy for her family, or Dopdi's dedication to her cause) and can instigate a stimulus of inquiry into the cognition of the reader – thereby there are special mechanisms to prevent any polysemic model of association and to restrict the free flow of receptor's cognition.

It is obvious therefore that the translated texts exist only to moderate a 'desire' for cultural propagation. The reader then is not opting for his own desire (the derivative meaning of the text), rather it is the cultural mechanics, who are denoting it for him. The readers pursue the plight of the translated texts by being motivated through a mediator. The characteristic trait in all of these mediated texts is a desire exhibited by the characters themselves. Jashoda is a 'proud woman', she exclaims: "a woman breeds, so here medicine, there blood-peshur, here doctor's visits. Showoffs! Look at me! I've become a year-breeder! So is my body failing, or is my milk drying? Makes your skin crawl? I hear they are drying their milk with injushuns. Never heard of such things!" (Devi, "Breast Giver" 54). The mediator by remaining absently present allows for a free flow of association between the desires of the character(s) and the desires of the reader. Though, in a culturally text, the mediator functions from the textural illusion, yet the process of mediation always remain present. Behind the characters desperate course of actions (illusions of choices), a 'voice' always make its presence feel and functions as an innovator to create an immersive textual aura: "The footsteps turn left. Dopdi touches her waist. In her palm the comfort of a half-moon...the lights of the camp at a distance. Why is Dopdi going this way? Stop a bit, it turns again...Not a word must be said. Dopdi has seen the new camp, she has sat in the bus station...this information cannot now be passed on. They will understand Dopdi Mejhen has been countered" (Devi, "Draupadi" 32). In this symbiosis, the reader arbitrarily derives the consolation of a metaphoric association between his cognitive stimuli and the character's course of actions as parallel, even though the elements were pre-structured and is based into a false catharsis.

The impulsive catharsis at the end of these translated texts is an ulterior impulse, employed by the mediator to generate negative empathy. It is thereby fascinating that the cultural mechanics are not only filtering

the content of the translated discourses, but is strategically allowing the generation of negative criticism at the end of these narratives. Gerard (in his Deceit, Desire & the Novel) by extensively analysing the connection between the mode of prohibition and anti-criticism has remarked:

> *Only someone who prevents us from satisfying a desire (the characters own plight of actions) which he himself has inspired in us is truly an object of hatred. The person who hates first hates himself for the secret admiration (identification with a character) concealed by his hatred. In an effort to hide this desperate admiration from others, and for himself he no longer wants to see in his mediator (the cultural filtration) anything but an obstacle (11).*

Thus, at the climactic end when "Dopdi's black body comes even closer. Dopdi shakes with an indomitable laughter that Senanayak simply cannot understand... (Dropdi) says in a voice that is terrifying, sky splitting, and sharp as her ulutation, what's the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again? Are you a man?" (Devi, "Draupadi" 36) – the distinction between reader's appreciation and cultural probation vanishes. The textual suffering functions synonymously for the reader and for the textual character; and ends in an impasse, from which it becomes never possible to illuminate the cultural mechanics which are shrouding the nature and cause of the authorial polysemy.

Almost every domain at the hands of the cultural mechanics has become an 'obvious factorization'. The readers decode the text, thinking that his understanding is parallel with authorial intention – whereas in reality the author (Mahasweta Devi) is not the originator of the texts. It is not fictitious, however, to impeach on these translated texts – where the categorical forces are eluding the cognition of the readers and are generating consents. The readers upon an exposure, only receives the surface meaning of the texts without questioning the multiplicity of authorial intentions. To an extent, they even feel that the text have become a 'sacred' being, unfolding an unforeseen parameter exclusively to them; and hence derives superior gratification from his understanding. An immediate question then comes: are there no alterations to such facade translations? The answer lies in the contextualization: the readers are not interpreting the texts in vacuum; a continuous flow of a 'suffering' text keeps the imagination of the reader alive. The reader's imaginative capability too in this respect is not superfluous – it is very specific for those readers who crave violence. The textual violence (physical violence against Dopdi, or the psychological violence against Jashoda) adequately incurs a similar emotion in the reader.

The mimetic ideology instilled in the readers by the textual violence (of the translated texts) categorizes them into a reading community – within a space and time creating a homogenous nostalgia from a textual deformity. This textual deformity need not to be a physical one, for example "there is such a thing as social abnormality; here the average defines the norm (in Draupadi it is the police personnel, and in Breast Stories it is the patriarchal structure). The further one is from social status (as tribal people are) of whatever kind, the greater the risk of persecution (Girard, The Scapegoat 35). This textual illusion configures the reader's

consciousness, and probes him/her into absorbing the proposed textual course of actions. In doing so, the objective of the translated text remains the same; its target is to showcase a possible number of 'activities' and encourage the reader into following one. No matter how objective the reader is he/she drinks these stereotypical formulations and juxtaposes them in his/her approach to reality.

Conclusion:

Existence in a materialistic society is essentially based on differentiation of one individual against another and the individual's search for legitimacy is often justified against the courses of another. Whereas the Bengali works of Mahasweta Devi strives to propose an alternative to this; the culturally translated texts coming away from their authorial intentions are glorifying this legitimacy. This impact is so deep rooted that even the mere mention of a 'suffering personality' invariably invokes the mentalese communication of a 'suffering woman' in the reader's mind; thereby he/she becomes readily absorbed into the text. In this respect, the reader is encouraged to feel one-self not only different, but also extremely differentiated from (real or imaginary) oppressive forces – and the text entertains this paradigm to its highest pivotal axis. Delaying the climactic catharsis to its optimum (by synthesizing the narrative unfolding with the progression of the reader's mental apparatus), it diverts the reader's conscious cognition from authorial plurality to cultural singularity. The signs which are indicative that the reader is now 'decoding' according to the preference of the said mechanics – are not embedded within the text, rather they are being enforced from the outside. Any form of revolt against (by preaching against cultural mode of translation) it will only lead to its strengthening of application. Therefore, even though negations and criticisms are in existence, they have been co-joined and are filtered in its propaganda for morality. This tendency is omni-pervasive. Irrespective of temporal and spatial categorizations the same mechanics are being employed to cater to the responses against a sufferer. Despite what is proposed against it, whenever a translated text about suffering makes its appearance, it will follow the same paved way – where the individual consciousness will become an object in construction.

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