

**Depicting lived realities of women in the Postcolonial context and the politics
of Translation:
Select Indian Short Stories**

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Abstract

The development of modern Indian literature took place in the second half of the 19th Century. Modern Indian literature reflects the diversity of modern India, reflecting the complexity of India's encounter with colonials, feudal landlords, caste system, class discrimination and other such issues. Indian writers began writing in modern literary forms to represent new realities, along with re-imagining the folkloric historical past to advocate for Social and Political change. Writing in Indian languages was an important feature of modern writing. Modern literature could be determined by presentation of realism, linear narrative and a focus on the community, displacing the age-old Indian tradition of myths and poetry, with the emphasis laid on trail images and social types. Many Indian writers dealt with the ways in which Indian women of middle and upper class were oppressed by the denial of education and freedom.

By the 1930's and early 1940's the short story has emerged as a major genre in Indian literature. Premchand, U.R Ananthamurthy and others are celebrated for their classic short stories on similar themes (the motif of post Independence India).

My paper shall focus on the writings of Premchand (*The Shroud*), Rajendra Singh Bedi (*Lajwanti*), Saadat Hasan Manto (*Siyah Hashiye*), Mahasweta Devi (*Breast stories*), Vaidehi (*An Afternoon with Shakuntala*) and few others. This article shall focus on the politics of translating Indian native language texts into English. This is an attempt to study the deconstructionist approach of traditional representation of women and their revolutionary process. I shall focus on the construction of women characters and the discourse of narrative resistance.

Keywords: Reverse Gaze, Partition, Post-independence, Patriarchy, Marginalization, Post structuralism

INTRODUCTION

In his essay *The Nature and Purpose of Literature*, Premchand claims that unless a piece of literature presents the quality of the contemporary world it has no appeal to the mankind. The Indian progressive writer's association and its members represent the realities of life and the surrounding. Premchand is of the view that a subjective art drags us down to location and positivity, whereas progressive literature serves the mankind and the society along with generating power to act against the odds. Progressive literature generally portrayed the existing social and political situations. They were set in the immediate pre and post independence era. Premchand asserts that only the works creations can be called literature which expresses truth, and has the quality to affect the mind of the reader. The most deal with daily events, the theme of caste, religion, cultural ethos, modernity and the condition of women are the prevailing themes in the words of modern realist writers. Premchand's primary focus was on language and presentation of reality to create a wonderful and purposeful work of literature. Language to be chosen must be flexible so that one can express themselves accurately. And the creation must be impactful by representing reality. Premchand talks about the concepts of beauty and aesthetic. He states that a writer must have great intensity to observe, so that his creation becomes impactful. Premchand believes that it is the duty of a writer to advocate and the present the deprived, weak and approved section of the community. He thinks society will change only when truth becomes as clear as day and cannot be ignored any more. These writers must address the issues of the deprived, by writing a story, keeping the truth of reality in mind. The writer must examine human psychology and human nature and then move forward to the creation of his characters in every given situation. Premchand asserts that writer must be progressive in nature. A writer should thing of fine tools to liberate the oppressed through his works. The reader expects a real character from these authors, which would suffer like normal human beings and their journey of life would be similar. Readers want characters whose plight is similar to them, to whom they can relate. Thus the writers must take into cognizance the requirements of the readers. Premchand further states that an artist's loyalty must rest with truth of creation. He also provides importance to harmony in general term in the context of the writers' inner self, cause literature is an expression of the artist's inner self.

With the influence of the Progressive Writers' Association and the revival of interest in progressive writing, the modern Indian authors took a great turn towards portraying reality in their writing. Sajjad Zaheer, a founder member of the Progressive Writers' Association, played an important role in shaping the political consciousness of a large number of people. The PWA's members not only uplifted the political, social and literary canvas of India, they also re-crafted the existing literary tradition

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change. Writing in Indian languages was an important feature of modern writing. Modern literature could be determined by presentation of realism, linear narrative and a focus on the community, displacing the age-old Indian tradition of myth and poetry, with the emphasis laid on real images and social types. Many Indian novelists dealt with social issues, conflicts relating to the condition of women in Indian society. These novels dealt with the ways in which Indian women of middle and upper classes were oppressed by the denial of education and freedom. By the 1930's and early 1940's the short story has emerged as a major genre in Indian literary canon. Premchand, U.R. Ananthamurthy and other are celebrated for their classic short stories on similar themes. Independence influenced the writers in way that they wrote about the ideals and realities of post-colonial nationhood in their works. The separation of Indian subcontinent into two different nations, initiated the grasp of violence among the traumatized Indian people. Partition played a significant role in the writing of many Indian authors.

ROLE OF TRANSLATION IN THE POSTCOLONIAL CONTEXT

Translation in relation to colonization always centered on the notion that translation between languages involves unequal power relations. The process of translation can be used as a powerful metaphor to understand the complex politics of cultural exchange that take place under colonial rule.

Translation is an activity of transferring a text from one language to another. It is more than just the transfer of meaning. It deals with political and cultural dimensions that concern the translation of languages along with cultural contexts between different countries, cultures and political systems. To know the history of Indian Literature, one must know the majority of the Indian language or she must take help of understanding the minds of great Indian writers who wrote in different Indian languages through Translation.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak focuses on how post colonialism and cultural studies have involved issues of translation, the transnational and colonization. The connection between colonization and translation comes into action due to the argument that translation has played an active role in the colonization process and in disseminating an ideologically motivated portrait of colonized people.

Power relations are the significant reason behind the intersection of translation studies and postcolonial theory. Tejaswini Niranjana, in her work *Sitting Translation: History, Post-structuralism, and the Colonial Context*, sees translation as one of the discourses which inform the hegemonic apparatus that belong to the ideological structure of colonial rule. She criticizes translation studies because it itself is largely a Western Orientation. She thinks Translation Studies has not considered the quest of power imbalance between languages. She is of the view that the concepts in Western translation theories are flawed and that translation in the colonial context builds a conceptual image of colonial domination into the discourse of Western Philosophy. Niranjana recommends some action for the postcolonial translations, that the translator must keep in view every aspect of colonialism and Liberal Nationalism. She puts an effort in deconstructing and identifying the means by which the West repressed the non-European and marginalizes its own otherness.

The colonial and postcolonial eras have their own historical and socio-political specifications. English held a hegemonic status in India during the colonial period. Now, English is the language accepted in the global market, therefore Indian literature translated into English has a unique place because of its colonial past and the politics of supremacy of English. Agencies like National Book Trust, Sahitya Akademi have been established in order to accelerate the interest in translation to promote Indian books to a wide spectrum of readership. Translation has always been an integral part of Indian literature. It began with the translation of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* from Sanskrit to local Indian languages. In the multicultural and multilingual land of India, translation is considered to be a creative activity which can evolve freely.

Professor Harish Trivedi deals with the history of translation in India. He is a postcolonial writer and thus deals with post colonialism and postcolonial discourse in the context of translation and literature. Trivedi notes how the author Premchand of the colonial era translated Anatole France's *Thais*, and considers this as a complete political act, because Premchand chose a text which was not part of the literary canon of colonial power but was a text of its rival, France.

Rabindranath Tagore, while translating *Gitanjali*, into English, refashioned his text to suit an English poetic sensibility and to feed the English readers. Tagore Orientalized his Bengali text, suppressing details and ideas of Indian 'origins', which he thought would not sit well with an English speaking readership. Thompson states that Tagore the English translator treated Tagore the Bengali poet in the most cavalier fashion. Tagore changes, chops and omits his original Bengali work to satisfy his Orientalist English readers. It is considered to be a degree of voluntary assimilation. A significant feature of postcolonial translation is translation from foreign language to Indian language; it was a point of turning away from works of Anglo-American literature.

This shows that Translation of texts in colonial and postcolonial depends implicitly on a political act. The post-colonial society was represented in symbolic form in literature. Postcolonial Translation makes us aware of the hierarchies between cultures, and the fact that reception of translation challenges these hierarchies. Translations were performed according to the need of the contemporary time.

In his essay, *The Politics of Postcolonial Translation*, Trivedi writes that Translation is like Politics, which has undergone a wide expansion of meaning in the modern era. Now the traditional sense of reading a text in one language has been transformed. Translation contributed to the shaping of imagination rules in the colonial state. The post-independence era presented translation as a political act and a cultural process, in the selection of the text and language. It was a medium of showing the colonizers the rich civilization of the natives through translations. The idea of Nation Building is also an important phenomenon in the Indian discourse, which creates diversity. Postcolonial Translation is a special and creative activity that bridges the space between the marginal text and its new readership in a different language.

According to Trivedi, translation involves an interaction not only between two authors, or two author- functions, but also between languages and cultures. Translation is an interaction with political implications. He judges translation primarily on the scale of postcolonial theory. For him, translation forms a site for the postcolonial experiment. He accuses Homi Bhaba for marginalization of bilingualism and translation as specifically interlingual practice.

The moment of translation in India came in 1750 during colonial rule. Charles Wilkins translated the *Bhagavad Gita* which is the first Sanskrit text translated in English. William Jones' foundation of Asiatic Society of Bengal is significant to understand Indian culture. He also translated *Geeta Govinda* and Kalidasa's *Abhijnanasakuntalam*. All the translations by colonizers were intended to perpetuate hegemonic ethnographic agenda and to colonize the native Orient. It was part of an approach to understand colonized people by enforcing superiority. Earlier, many Indian scholars and translator's helped the Western translators but their contribution was not mentioned in these translated texts. In the postcolonial period, it is required to reconstruct and rethink new perspectives of the relationship between source and target texts where translation from Indian language to English was common during the period immediately after independence; translation from one Indian language to another Indian language was very rare. Translations during the colonial era by British translators were highly concerned about their economic interests, their understanding of Indian culture and their establishment of imperial power. Translation in the post-colonial times was a method of reclaiming the past, history, culture and politics. Translations became counter-hegemonic in relation to the West. Translation during the postcolonial era was done to represent the third world in the field of literature. Earlier translation was influenced by power politics but in the postcolonial era this became difficult.

"The politics of translation," is a significant essay that combines feminist, post colonialist, and poststructuralist perspectives. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak emphasizes the contradictions between different techniques through several examples and calls for the translator to abandon his or her self to the text. She goes on to say that the feminist translator's job is to use language as a pointer to the gendered agency's inner workings. As a translator, Spivak understands the difficulties that come with translating; as a result, she understands why people prefer logic over rhetorical conclusions, but she emphasizes that by doing so, they miss out on important hints concealed in the source text. Spivak is interested in the politics of translation from a non-European women's writing, because many times the translator fails to interact with the original's rhetoricality. In the process of attempting to convey something significant, the translator creates a realm outside of language. In the attempt to interact with the 'other,' this is most disturbingly staged (and questioned). Otherness is therefore different-deferred into another person who resembles us, even if only in the most superficial way, and with whom we can converse.

The importance of getting to know the text before translating is emphasized, and the implications of not doing so are demonstrated via the work of a variety of feminist translators. The author then emphasizes the importance of translators continually developing and being aware of cultural differences. She also warns against romanticizing any culture and promotes a realistic, but well-founded, analytical approach to translating its works. Learning the mother tongue of the other person is recommended by Spivak as a means of genuinely comprehending distinctions between people — language is viewed as a tool of self-expression. The translator's job is to foster this intimacy between the "original" and the "shadow," to allow maximal "rhetoric" freedom, and to maintain the translator's "agency" under strict control. She uses the following two translations of Mahasweta Devi's story, '*Stanadayini*,' to demonstrate her point: It's been translated as '*The Breast Giver*' by Spivak and '*The Wet Nurse*' by another translator. The latter, ignoring the original's eloquence, simply represents the translator's logic:

"The theme of treating the breast as organ of labour-power-as-commodity

and the breast as metonymic part-object standing in for other-as-object—the way in which the story plays with Marx and Freud on the occasion of the woman's body—is lost even before you enter the story."ⁱ

PARTITION IN LITERATURE MAKING

Partition of India was a seminal event that violently pulled apart cultures, and countries, deepening the religious divisions among common people. Qurratulain Hyder's *Sita Betrayed* is a work dealing with resentment for the forced changes that Partition had brought about in people's lives.

Similarly, *Lajwanti*, a short story by Rajender Singh Bedi deals with the sensitive issue of Partition. The protagonist Sunderlal represents the nationalist, secular progressive point of view as against the Conservative and patriarchal discourse. The story serves a universal purpose, despite being a fiction. The abduction of women in the post-partition context, the cultural pressures to reject them after their return to their own country, the women's inability to express their trauma, affected many people in the post-partition time of India and Pakistan, especially in the border state of Punjab, which is the backdrop of the story *Lajwanti*. Saadat Hasan Manto, in his Urdu short stories writes about the truth, bitterness, violence of Partition. His presentation of female characters and their plight is enough to delve deeper into the ethos of women in post-independence India and Pakistan. Manto's *Siyah Hashiye (Black Margins)*, is influenced by Partition riots. He depicts the fact that how every form of violence victimizes the women and girls of a community, because they are the ones targeted in most political and social disorder. *Lajwanti* displays a lamenting voice rooted in the discourse of Partition which could be criticized in a poststructuralist approach. The male character of the story Sunderlal, is presented by Bedi in the initial phase as someone who is very Liberal and a person who would accept whole heartedly if his abducted wife comes back. But in reality, he accepts his wife in a way that at heart he is more like those who refuse to accept their abducted wife. The only difference is that he cannot speak about this unacceptance because he is the leader of the local rehabilitation campaign, working for the abducted women and their acceptance. In the story, one can find how the state and patriarchal interests coincide. It is a story of transformation of identities. The radicalism of *Lajwanti*, repressing patriarchal attitudes towards women's chastity might be explained in detail way which Progressive Writers opened up a space to question social norms related to sexuality. The story also deals with the widows subjected to the structures of widowhood in an orthodox Hindu community.

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AND VIOLENCE

The voice of women character of *Lajwanti*, Lajo was so accustomed to the beatings of Sunderlal, her husband that resisted the ideas of him not beating her. Domestic violence became a societal norm. Lajo prefers the certainty of her husband's old violence, above his treating her like a 'Devi'. The internalized notion of patriarchy, violence, suffering of women can be found in the works of Mahasweta Devi, a Bengali writer. She is horrified at the game of politics and the humiliation of lower castes, especially the women, are subjected to. She presents the untrodden

realities that happen behind the socio-economic iron curtains. The three stories from her **Breast Stories**, named *Draupadi*, *Breast-giver* and *Behind the Bodice* deal with the exploitation of lower caste women. In her stories, breasts are more than just a symbol; it becomes a means of harsh attack on the unfair social system. Mahasweta Devi challenges the official position of silence.

Behind the Bodice (*Choli ke Peeche*) is a story about a Dalit migrant labour Gangor's wrath and resistance against her exploiters or against the patriarchal social order. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak observes the aboriginal Dopdi of *Draupadi*, and the migrant Gangor of *Choli ke Peeche*, as the subjects of resistant rage. *Choli ke Peeche*, was the title of a song in a Hindi film released in 1993. Every common man got indulged in discovering what was there? instead of focusing on the national media, religious gatherings, movements, government officials. In this story, a similar obsession of Upin, a photographer, towards the attractive body of Gangor is presented. Mahasweta Devi also portrays how Upin becomes the cause of Gangor's disaster and the consequence of manhandling, exploited, and transformation of Gangor into a prostitute. Upin, towards the end of the story realizes that behind the Bodice is rape of people, not just breasts. Mahasweta Devi never leaves a room for her readers to romanticize the notion of breasts; instead she merges several social, cultural, political issues along with the common erotic object.

The photographs captured by Upin of topless Gangor, while she was feeding her new born, transforms the life of the tribal woman. She becomes the victim of several gang rapes. She becomes the victim of the Patriarchal social order. Devi brings forth the notion of issues of gang rape, prostitution, issues faced by tribal women along with the issue of unethical journalism. When the photographs goes public, it turns into a scandalous affair. Gangor us raped by the policemen of her region. Here, Devi even portrays the picture of the legal system of the country. When Upin realizes of the incidents, he goes in search of Gangor, to find that she is now a prostitute and no longer accepted in the village. Gangor, embodies all the woman in society. From the story, we come to know that women turn their physicality in to an analogy of resistance, which was earlier associated with powerlessness and shame. Mahasweta Devi does not romanticize the tribal lady. Her depictions are realistic, her language invokes complex emotions, providing the reader's with the sense of the change that could take place if women were to resist the roles prescribed to then by the society. Devi celebrated the female body to overcome oppression and objectification.

The theme of gender roles, along with the rohstoff taken from issues of independence, traditions, honour, responsibility and poverty prevails in Premchand's short story named **The Shroud** (*Kafn*). Premchand places a spotlight on the role of women. The female character, Budhia appears to have done all the roles assigned to her, when she was alive. She was treated as a slave by both the men of the house, Ghishu and Madhav. Budhia had no independence and performed all the duties that are pre-assigned and that are expected to be done by a woman, possibly because she was considered inferior to both the men due to her gender. Women are always considered weaker sections of the community. Women remained the unpaid workers and child -bearers in the society. Premchand displays the role of women within the institution of marriage and how women remain subservient to the male members of their family. The story also suggests that money can bring independence, with the idea that after Ghisu gets five rupees

from begging, he gets drunk and take control of his life. Later regrets for not buying the shroud for Budhia, but that lasts only for a short time.

Hindu society, responsible for the permission of the great religion, is a theme that is found in many of Premchand's works. Though the caste of the character not properly revealed in the story, the incident can happen to anyone in remote village in any community. The caste is deliberately imposed on character. The poverty of Madhav and Ghishu is shown as self inflicted rather than situational. The Dalit are portrayed as if they do not retain affection at all for other family members, showcasing the picture of a woman suffering of labour pain during her childbirth. Premchand's characterization in the story is unethical and artificial. Budhia undergoes labour pain, no woman of the community comes for help, but they come to see her dead body. A woman in labour pain is never left alone in any community. Also, according to Hindu traditions, a dead body is always left with an attendant. But here in the story, Madhav and Ghishu leave to buy the shroud, leaving the dead body to no one. It is very improbable and unusual in the Indian context. The characters presented by Premchand are hardly seen to be humane or anywhere near humanity.

The Shroud is a story of invisible violence inflicted upon by the effect of poverty. It is rather a psychological realist story. Premchand showcases the gamut of Subaltern experiences. Character of Madhav and Ghishu are described from the upper caste point of view and branded as useless fellows. The story also highlights the sense of tradition in the Hindu religious discourse.

Ghatashraddha of U.R. Ananthamurthy is another short story about the Hindu Brahmanical hegemony. Ghatashraddha is a Sanskrit phrase for the last rites of a person in the Hindu religious context. The story reflects the elements which Ananthamurthy finds problematic in the Brahmanic community and represents the complex layers of the Hindu conventional society. Distinction on the basis of caste is well portrayed in the story. The story speaks about the plight of women, a widow who challenges the traditional order. It depicts the tension between the process of being and becoming. Ananthamurthy is aware of how the unrestricted male gaze attempts to construct and control the female figure. His works' literary discourse also emphasizes the rupture of this male gaze in the form of the reverse feminine gaze. The female subject is led to settle herself as the object of desire by this reverse gaze, which opposes the objective of structuring woman inside masculine desire. It undermines the prevailing constructs of the Brahmin male self by disrupting the objectification of the feminine subject.

Challenging the patriarchal disorder has remained a significant notion in the works of female Indian authors. Vaidehi, in *An Afternoon with Shakuntala*, brings out the marginalization and oppression, hindering the power structure of the society. Vaidehi goes back to the theme of Kalidasa's epic *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, because we look for relativity template. She employs a newer perspective to that already happened. Vaidehi challenges the postcolonial theme of Horizon of Expectations by presenting a dilemmatic position of the epic characters. Vaidehi challenges the epic *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, by portraying Shakuntala in an instance where she rejects to show the ring to the king, which was a symbol of their union. Shakuntala declares that a minor ring cannot be an antidote of identification; here Vaidehi subverts the premise of

Kalidasa's epic. In Kalidasa's epic, Sanmati comes and takes Shakuntala away. But Shakuntala of Vaidehi claims that no such being comes to take her away. She is not somebody like her mother Menaka, who abandons her child. She tries to reclaim her position of having pre-marital intercourse. She is also not like Sita of *Ramayana*, who escapes when the earth splits. Shakuntala allows her son Bharat to go with Dushyanta, but she herself refuses to come. Vaidehi embraces the fact that she will have to live old solitary life in Hemakuta. We find no trace of regret of her decision. Vaidehi depicts the psychological development of the atman and not Dushyanta. She subverts the patriarchal gave through the portrayal of Shakuntala's character by creating a reverse gaze. She erases the popular connotation of Kalidasa. In the Sanskrit epic we find Shakuntala apologizing from Dushyanta, but in Vaidehi, Shakuntala breaks the pre-given epic notion of Kalidasa. Vaidehi employs a female interviewer, as a feminist literary trope, who interviews Shakuntala and listens to her like a patient sister. This plays the role of an example of feminist ploy by Vaidehi. Shakuntala subverts the idea of the Normative. Women become speaking subject in Vaidehi's works. Vaidehi's exploration of female sexuality is what makes her works unique. Vaidehi presents Kalidasa's Shakuntala like a flawed and misrecorded character. But telling Shakuntala to narrate her story, Vaidehi points the women's need of deconstructing traditional representation of narrative resistance. Vaidehi's retelling of Kalidasa's Shakuntala can be comparable with Mahasweta Devi's subversion of Draupadi in her story *Draupadi* from the *Breast Stories*. Both Devi and Vaidehi subvert the epic characters by employing feminist criteria and bring them to the contemporary social structure. They both re-formulate the women's identities, as prescribed in the popular epics. The women writers have innovatively used the motifs of epics and myths as spheres of resistance.

CONCLUSION

Any nation's narrative shapes its people's identities, including their sense of self. It's also a discussion about the spaces that define communities, classes, and genders. These locations, in turn, dictate the frames that are available and the power issues that arise. Those on the periphery are the decentralized, inarticulate, and invisible margins, while those in the center are the selves that others perceive as the other. Alternate spaces, mute voices, and twisted subjects are the others. The Indian nation's story after independence had to be rewritten from new perspectives. The postcolonial experience, as well as the trauma of Partition, demanded that new positions be taken aside from those of the freedom struggle. It became necessary to define the new nation not only in terms of geographical boundaries or historical contexts of tradition and roots, but also to account for new political, social, and gender power structures. This interpretation of Indian identity as it emerges in women's discourse necessitates re-formulations of selves and renegotiations of centers and margins.ⁱⁱ

Notes:

ⁱSpivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "The Politics of Translation", in Lawrence Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*. London. New York: Routledge, 2000. Pg 400. Print.

ⁱⁱShaik, Basha and Madhavi, K. "Narrating the Nation from Gendered Locations". *International Journal of Research in Education and Psychology*. Vol 3. Issue 2. 2017.

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