

CULTURAL TRANSLATION IN KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S NOVEL *BOMBAY TIGER*

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Colonial and postcolonial history of literary writing in India has paved a ground for literary and linguistic translation studies. But Susan Bassnett says that literal and linguistic translations have failed to take an account of the broader contextual dimensions and such translations “are obsessed with making pointless evaluative judgements” (3). This failure of literary and linguistic translation has opened new fields for the translators in historical, social and cultural contexts. This ground has further given impetus to a new branch known as ‘Cultural Translation’ with the help of Cultural Studies. The word “translation” is derived from Latin word *translates* which means “to carry across”. And the idea of culture is defined by Raymond Williams as “the whole way of life.” So the term Cultural Translation means “to carry across the whole way of life of the people living on a particular region”.

Birgit Wagner writes in an article “Cultural Translation: A Value or A Tool? Let’s Start With Gramsci!” that Cultural Translation is commenced by Antonio Gramsci in his famous work *Prison Notebooks* as translation and translatability to end linguistic and cultural misunderstandings. Translation is the fundamental concept in his *Prison Notebooks* where he explores the importance of translation as a metaphor for cultural analysis. He uses the word translation to express the cultural elements of one nation into the language of the other nation or culture. Wegner further says that for Gramsci translation means a “transfer processes ‘between’ cultures” (2). The metaphorical approach of the term translation is a communicative process to attribute meaning that is different to the text’s literal meaning. Peter Ives and Rocco Lacorte in their edited book *Gramsci, Language and Translation* have defined Gramsci’s translation as a practical activity and translatability as a process of translation “between two national cultures—that is, the ways, at first sight apparently disparate and unconnected” (114). And Baratta says that translatability is difference,

. . . difference . . . among others, a central notion to postcolonial studies, difference as a process never concluded, always produced in discursive acts and never ‘given’ as a natural fact. Difference can be considered the limit of translatability in as much as a word, or a value, or a pattern of behaving will remain ‘other’ (Wegner 6).

According to Wagner, Homi K, Bhabha is the second big name to elaborate the metaphorical approach of translation. And Susan Bassnett says that for Bhabha “the term ‘translation’” is “not to describe a transaction between texts and languages but in the etymological sense of being carried across from one place to another” (6). Bhabha himself says

in *The Location of Culture* that cultural translation is an enunciatory process to show up “the hybridity of any genealogical or systematic filiation” (58). This enunciatory process of symbol and signs makes possible the borderline movement of translation and Walter Benjamin’s ‘foreignness of language’. The process of cultural translation has become complex and significant because of new cultural formations as minority discourse due to migration, displacement and relocation. The great advantage of being migrant or displaced is an increasing awareness of the construction of indigenous culture and tradition which helps a migrant to understand the ambivalence of cultural difference and gives birth to the narratives of identification. This increasing awareness of identification has discovered a way to bring the newness to the world. This spirit of introducing newness encourages the migrant to focus “. . . on making the linkages through the unstable elements of literature and life - the dangerous tryst with the ‘untranslatable’ - rather than arriving at ready-made names” (227). Through the concept ‘foreignness of language’ Bhabha says that Benjamin explores “the performativity of translation as the staging of cultural difference” (227). The occurrence of cultural translation in minority discourse is emerged because of the disjunctive existence of modernity which ensures that “what *seems*- the ‘same’ within cultures is negotiated in the time-lag of the ‘sign’ which constitute the intersubjectivity. . . ” (247).

To make linkage between two cultures Bhabha advocates for cultural translation which has created a third space for the negotiation of different cultures to “articulate essential and *expressive* identities between cultural differences in the contemporary world” (219). It has deconstructed “the transparent assumptions of cultural supremacy. . . (228). He further says that in that very act of disjunction cultural translation “demands a contextual specificity, a historical differentiation *within* minority positions” (228). Bhabha explores the etymological significance of cultural translation that this process was first used by the colonizers, “which has inevitably accompanied the installation of modernity through the legacies of colonization” (Hubbard and Kitchin 71).

Cultural translation has explored the ambivalence of cultural differences and deconstructed the supremacy of any single culture through the wide speaking English language. Thus, cultural translation as a manifest of translation is also bound to language. Because, through language the author can carry across the cross-cultural identities and try to make a bridge to fill the gap between two different cultures which is one of the most important targets of post-colonial literature. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, “. . . all post-colonial literatures are cross-cultural because they negotiate a gap between ‘worlds’ a gap in which the simultaneous process of abrogation and appropriation continually strive to define and determine their practice” (38). In this way cultural translation has become a strategy of representation and empowerment and a strong medium on the one hand to exchange values, cultures and meanings and on the other to convey cultural complexities and sensibilities. It has challenged and abrogated the notion of centrality and authenticity and has proved that the marginal is as real and authentic as the assumed centre in itself. This strategy privileges the marginal to assert her/ his own identity.

Indian Postcolonial diaspora writers have played the role of cultural translators very well. They have carried across Indian culture to the rest of the world through their writings in English. Indian culture is, according to D. P. Mukerji, shaped by Hindu philosophy that is primarily mythical in nature. Hinduism in itself is not a religion but a mosaic of religions and there is no definite set of beliefs and ideas. Moral values e.g. truth, non-violence, goodness of heart and spirit are the founding stones of this culture. A. B. Shah and C. R. M. Rao emphasize the place of

family in Indian culture as a broader unit of social, economic and cultural participation in India. Social configuration depends on four *Varnas* that is fixed by birth and decides human destiny in India. The framework of Indian tradition and culture is codified by *Manusmriti*.

This particular identity of Indian culture is carried across by postcolonial writers of India. They have contributed a lot to make an understanding of Indian culture in the West. Kamala Markandaya is one of the most famous names in these literary cultural translators. She worked hard throughout her writing career to establish a cross-cultural understanding between the East and the West for which her publishers intended nominate her for the Nobel Prize. She is regarded as an authentic representative writer of Indian culture and society in the West by R. Ranasinha, W. Walsh, Uma Parameshwaran and C. K. Naik etc. While living in London Markandaya was denied the privileged centrality of Western culture and kept her faith alive in her native culture. She wore *sari* and *bindi* in her whole life. She transformed her faith into the literary genre, novel. She struggled hard to validate her peripheral experiences embedded to the culture of her birth place i.e. South Indian culture.

In her novel *Bombay Tiger (BT)* Markandaya has presented her native culture through the main characters of the novel. This novel has got published posthumously by the deceased author's daughter, Kim Oliver, in 2008. This novel carries across the way of life of South Indian people through untranslated words of indigenous language, cultural fragments and scenes and situations. She translates the values, norms, daily routine, food habits, clothing, celebration of festivals and social relationships etc of this particular culture. She presents a fare observation of this culture with all of its bright and dark aspects.

The story revolves around the business tycoon Ganguli, the “Bombay Tiger” and his daughter Chandralekha (Lekha) and brings forth cultural fragments through scenes and situations. Though Ganguli is a successful businessman and is following ideology of capitalism: a First World strategy to make profit as much as possible, yet he is deeply attached to his roots as his assistant Krishna says that, “Ganguli was more comfortable with his own style” (28). He remains attached to his sartorial simplicities of his village. Ganguli's wardrobe is full of *dhoti* and *kurta* and he wares *desi* outfits like string *banian* and *lungi* at home. He wears *achkan* and *durbar* coat on special occasions. In Indian culture people are habitual to visit friends, relatives and acquaintances at their home to maintain social relationships. Once Ganguli's childhood friend and business rival Rao comes to visit him at his home. Ganguli treats Rao in a pure South Indian tradition. He serves Rao South Indian food in traditional way on “old fashioned plantain leaves” (33) with the dishes particular to the South Indian food like boiled rice, *rasam*, *sambhar*, curd garnished with *papad*, *kasayam*, *idli*, *chutney*. They take siesta after lunch because they are tired of long hot day. Rao leaves his host's house after seeking his permission.

Ganguli is rich enough to arrange his marriage by himself but for this most important decision of his life he trusts his relatives and requests them to arrange a girl for him as it is the tradition in Indian society that marriages are arranged either by the parents or elder relatives or by a mediator. These people decide which boy is suitable for which girl. This system of arranged marriages is ambivalent in its effect. In some aspects it is valuable for India is not a country where young girls and boys are allowed to choose their life partners themselves because marriage is a spiritual relationship where physical attraction does not matter. And young people should take the advantage of their elders' experiences as well. But in other aspects it is a process of subjugation, especially for women. Young boys and girls have to accept their elders' decision and marry the person they have never seen before and this acceptance is just to attribute their

respect for their elders and social norms. Young people are neglected in taking the most important decision of their lives. Rao's son Seshu and Shakuntala's marriage is arranged by their parents but for Seshu this most important relationship is meant to give physical pleasure only. He is careless to his wife with whom he “. . . wedded, bedded, seeded and delivered. . . ” (79). Shankuntala also remains passive to this ignorance of her husband because it is not a wife's right to raise a question on her husband's activities.

People seek advice of an oracle before taking important decisions like marriage and investment of money in some kind of business. Experienced old ladies are specially recruited to sort out the problems between married couples and their families. These ladies help the married couples to make their married lives successful as a lifelong relationship. In the starting days of his married life Ganguli treats his wife as an animated doll to prove his masculinity over a female body. His wife also follows the tradition of silence on the part of a woman and remains passive to this beastly treatment: “The girl bore it all remarkably, without a word of protest, going to her family for help only after weeks of enduring her husband” (29). But at last she has to cry when her body which is made of flesh and blood has injured badly. At this time an experienced old lady is requested to sort out the problems between Ganguli and his wife. Ganguli is a good man by his heart. He gets success in maintaining it as a relationship full of spiritual and erotic love. He is so much involved in this relationship that he falls apart when his wife dies and realizes as “the best part of him went up in the flames” (30).

Young people hold fast to the faith of their elders in Hindu culture, which is packed with dogmas. In this culture a *pandit* is the upright pillar of the community and he must be vegetarian in its whole sense. He must neither eat nor touch any type of flesh whether it is to know the human body for medical research. Rao's father condemned Pandit Pandey to bring a deceased human liver for his son Rajiv to study the human body biologically. In India family is not a nuclear living of one couple and their children but it is a collective ascription of all the patriarchal blood relatives like grandparents, parents, father's brothers and unmarried sisters, children both married and unmarried and so on as Rao's family includes his aged parents, married son and daughter-in-law, his own daughter and grandson. All the aged people get same respect from their youngsters. However a nuclear family is unfortunate. The birth of a boy as first child is assumed fortunate because a male descendent is needed to continue the name of the family and after death to light the pyre as well. That is why when Ganguli's wife is dead without leaving a male descendent it dejects him more. Having a girl child as first birth or the only child is unfortunate because of patriarchal marriage and dowry system which degrades the place of a daughter in her own family. According to the dowry system a girl carries as much money and gifts with her as possible to her husband's home in marriage. Ganguli brings up his only girl child, Lekha, as a burden who he wants to dump as soon as possible. Because people do not invest where there is no assurance of return. Lekha is nurtured by nursemaid in loneliness because Ganguli remains unable to accept his girl child because he wanted a boy to support his business. When Seshu and Lekha are children Rao suggests Ganguli to betroth both children to strengthen their adult relationships. The biggest responsibility of parents is to marry their children as soon as possible because marriage is the whole settlement of life.

When Lekha turns eleven the factory workers suddenly change their eyes and see her as a freshly growing woman. This situation attracts Ganguli's attention to be careful for Lekha's chastity. He stops her coming to the factory and to the site. She is restricted to wear long skirts and long *dupatta*. *Dupatta* is supposed to veil a girl's bosom. The object *dupatta* signifies the

importance of female chastity in Indian culture as well as the difference of values in Eastern and Western cultures. There is no metonymy to signify the metaphorical meaning of the word *dupatta* though it can be translated in English as “a long piece of cloth”. This word brings a hybrid site of meaning. Bhabha says about the hybrid site of meaning that

hybrid sites of meaning open up a cleavage in the language of culture which suggests that the similitude of the *symbol* as it plays across cultural sites must not obscure the fact that repetition of the *sign* is, in each specific social practice, both different and differential. (Bhabha 168)

Lekha is strictly confined to the four walls of a lonely home and a chastity-belt is exercised on her. This chastity-belt is invented by the male members of society to preserve female chastity from harm. But in the name of chastity-belt she is prohibited to learn “a little about life, a little about men” (64). This lack of knowledge robs her life in the end. She is seduced by the film director, Sebastian; conceives his child and dies while delivering the fruit of his seduction. Indian people are habitual to chatter about and worry for the other people’s life which is definitely not of their concern. What Ganguli is doing for his only daughter and what Lekha is doing to her life is a matter of concern for the whole locality. But in the whole locality there is none to play the role of a mother to guide this motherless child. When Lekha is confined to her home and prohibited to go to school she is allowed to learn classical singing, music and dance which signifies the importance of these fine arts in South Indian culture. Ganguli arranges for her the teachers to teach her these fine arts. The classical dance of India is a kind of lifelong discipline which must be started in childhood “before the flesh has set, before the *soul* is mishandled” (70).

The festivals are the most important part of Indian culture and India is called “a country of festivals and celebrations”. On Diwali, Ganguli usually distributes *saris* through Lekha’s hands to the female factory workers. Holi is a festival celebrated in spring season with colours. The festival Holi is a metaphor of spring seasons as spring season brings life and colour back to the whole atmosphere after the autumn season similarly the festival Holi brings enthusiasm and sensibility back to people’s life after the business and malice of the passing year which has faded humanly feeling among human beings. To celebrate this festival Rao gives a public invitation not only to the people belonging to the Hindu religion but to the people belonging to other religions also. Rao’s daughter Nalini’s tutor Miss Pinto, a Christian and his guest Rajiv Pandey’s friend Dr. Jinwala, a Parsi are also invited to attend this public celebration which is signifying the “unity in diversity” of Indian culture. One speciality of this festival is that people do not wear their new clothes as they do on other festivals. They celebrate this festival in their old cloths with a crowd and not within the four walls of their homes. Ganguli celebrates this festival in his string *banian* and *lungi*. It is a very sizzling thought for the people even for the women to drench each other from head to foot with coloured water. And nobody is allowed to be angry on this occasion instead all these activities are welcome. Everyone is invited to celebrate this festival together whether s/he is kith and kin or not, rival or friend, known or unknown, rich or poor, aristocrat or proletariat, bagger or banker, everyone is equal on this festival which signifies the democracy in Indian social structure. This festival is seductive because the young people get a chance openly to mix up with each other without considering sex differences or moral and ethical values of Indian culture. They flirt with their opposite sex counterparts and sing songs of praise and seduction. But it is also a festival of recreation. People carry on their relationships with new

enthusiasm besides this public celebration. Rao invites his business rival Ganguli also to celebrate this festival with him and his family.

One of the darkest aspects of Indian culture is the story of a woman which sounds as the story of a soul in a nutshell. There is a homogenous emptiness in all female characters like Ganguli's wife, his daughter Lekha, Rao's wife, Seshu's wife and Kothari's wife and so on. These female characters are representing female subjugation in Indian society and culture though they are worshipped as Devi also. It seems as a woman's whole life is to revolve around man either as a father or husband or son. This is the destiny of a woman to be known after a man.

Along with these scenes and situations Markandaya has used untranslatable words like *dupatta*, *dhoti*, *lungi*, *sari*, *chillar*, *banian*, *rasam*, *paysam*, *idli*, *chutney*, *kasayam*, *ek-dum*, *jaldi-jaldi*, *pandit* to negotiate her native culture. These untranslated words have power to hold up cultural essence they are derived from and they are signifying the metaphorical interference of identity and totality. These words bring foreignness of language and contextual specificity. There is one more advantage in using untranslatable words like *dupatta*, *pandit*, *chutney* rather than a long piece of cloth, priest and sauce respectively that there are some of the cultural experiences those cannot be expressed through the language used in target culture. Such experiences need expressions from the source culture like *chutney*: paste of red-hot chillies which can fill mouth with water when one smells it. This expression cannot be brought by its metonym "sauce". The use of the untranslated words is a clear signifier of the fact that the language which actually informs is another one. According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, these words constantly draw the attention of the reader to discover "the horizons of the culture in which these terms have meaning" (64).

As a cultural translator Markandaya has to reconcile with the particular point of view of the target culture. She takes examples from her target culture also to make the text comprehensible for the target readers. Markandaya has used the phrase "Bombay criteria isn't Broadway's or off-Broadway's" (BT 67) to compare theatres of Bombay [India] to the Broadway theatre and off-Broadway theatre [smaller than Broadway theatre] in New York for popularity. She has traversed from source culture to the target culture through imagination or to say fiction. Because through imagination, as Wilson Harris says that the author can escape from dominance and subservience of past, present and future and imperial and colonial culture and history. And imagination is a ground for multicultural impulses to see the world to "deploy the destructive energies of European culture" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 34). Imagination is a way to reconstruct a future community based on no division or categorization. Markandaya has used her imagination quite successfully to translate her native culture to her target readers through this novel. As a cultural translator she is liberal while attempting to re-invent the centre. As a postcolonial writer she explores that it is not enough what the First World had seen or known. But there are so many things out of the First World to be known. There is a long unabridged gap between the East and the West in spite of a long period of colonial contact. Though Indian culture has been oppressed for more than two hundred years still Indian culture has its own identity and its people have enough enthusiasm to hold fast to their roots, and their faith in their indigenous culture.

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