'Local Stories of Translation'

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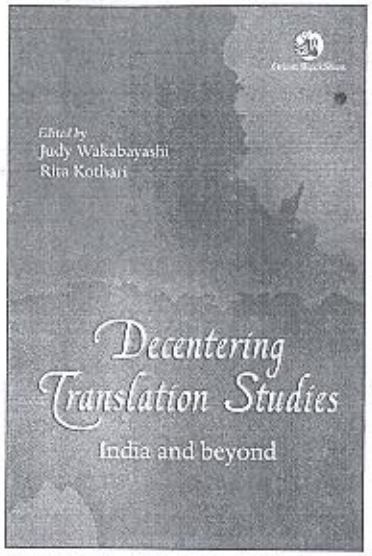

r Wakabayashi and Rita Kothari's *entering Translation Studies: India and d*, now in its Indian edition, seeks to h what the Introduction calls the 'lo- ories of translation', premised on the ption that local cultures and contexts line the nature of translation and trans- *theory*. Frankly acknowledging the ance of western practices and experi- of translation in Translation Studies, litors present an urgent cultural-po- need to look at traditional models and of translation that have long been re- d, in these West-centric studies as ard'. Thus questions of 'originality', henticity' are not part of translation s in say India or Japan as it is in the or the simple reason that in these cul- here is no 'fixity' to texts in the oral nd every iteration of the text is free to its own logic with no reference to an itative 'author' or 'original' (p. 4). these massive cultural differences in s of the text, author or 'the original', d to de-westernize translation studies ing in 'translational practices and ideas on-mainstream traditions' (p. 5), even very term or concept of 'translation' to be redefined.

NTERING TRANSLATION STUDIES: INDIA AND BEYOND
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. Ramakrishnan's paper points to this ing project as it can be discerned in Turning to a 15th century Malayalam self based on a canto of the *Bhagavata* —Ramakrishnan demonstrates how t moves away from the Sanskrit roots, 'losing its authoritative tone' (p. 32). nskrit original, says Ramakrishnan, be- pluralized to accommodate the local 's requirements of that age. rishnan thus sees local traditions of tion as inherently transformational, to address the concerns of the local at particular periods of time in his- pecially when this concern was radical oded to energize the emancipatory po- of that community. Kerala and lam identity was built through such translation.

. Satyanath's essay on a Shiva-Arjuna rom the *Mahabharata* focuses on ' as cultural transactions, incorporat- ral and sculptural depictions of the well. It was only from the 8th cen- ys Satyanath, that there was a 'sys- move to transform some of [the] oral and non-verbal knowledge into a written for- mat' (p. 52). What is important, however, is that 'with multiple tellings and renderings, categories such as gender, caste, religion, sects and language … protect their rights over their own epistemology and make telling and rendering activities … an exclusively in-group activity' (p. 55). Thus cultural identities were at stake in every translational act and monopolistic control over translations was therefore guarded.

V.B. Tharakeshwar, also working with Kannada translation, opens with the crucial point that 'the presence or absence of a genre becomes a measuring rod for the development of civilization' (p. 57). Thus the absence of tragedy as a genre in Sanskrit literature was treated by the colonial age as a cultural defect. Indian writers on the subject sought explanations—in rebirth theory or the theory of Karma—for the absence. Slowly, in Kannada literature and criticism translations of the Mahabharata or the Ramayana began to colour certain characters like Ravana as *tragic*. The choice of texts from Aeschylus and other Greeks was also founded on the need to introduce tragedy into Kannada, as translated texts. As Tharakeshwar shows, there was an attempt by the literary elite to construct an entire tradition of tragedy within Sanskrit texts, and thus claim precedence over European traditions in the same genre.

Many of the translation theories current in India—and perhaps globally—today have their origins in the colonial period, and this is Christi Merrill's subject. Merrill notes how, from their early days in India in the 17th century the English sensed their 'interpretive dependency' on native writers and translators. In the era of the Orientalists, 'government administrators looked for indigenous authorities that would help them translate British notions of law and justice into indigenous terms, unidirectionally' (p. 79). These moves were founded on notions of the hierarchy of languages as well as of 'standard' language, Merrill argues. There were, however, in Sanskrit traditions, indications that both *marga* and *deshi* traditions were not only acceptable but deemed essential: there was no hierarchy here, nor was there a fetishizing of singular origins.

Staying within the domain of colonial India, Masood Ashraf Raja traces the development and deployment of Urdu as the 'language of popular Muslim identity' (p. 96). Examining the *Kitab At-Tawhid* by the 18th century reformer Muhammad Ibn Abdul-Wahab, Raja argues that the text's translation created 'an absolute otherness within the larger discursive field of Islam' (p. 103). Broad interpretations of the Quran were restricted and the purist-literalist one preferred in Wahab's text. Offering what Raja calls an 'easily comprehensible path to salvation' (p. 105), such a translation laid the foundations for the 'most potent ideology of Islamic radicalism' (p. 105).

Tridip Suhrud's focus is Gandhi's translations into and from Gujarati. Suhrud begins with Gandhi's use of '*itihas*' and 'history' in an early text, on satyagraha in South Africa, and moves on to his translations of Ruskin and Plato. Suhrud demonstrates how Gandhi's philosophical ideas informed his translation of Ruskin's biblical *Unto This Last*. Gandhi did *not* translate this as 'antyodaya', or welfare of the last person but instead as 'sarvodaya'—the 'welfare of all', thus showing a major cultural-philosophical viewpoint in the very act of translation. Suhrud notes Gandhi's struggles with the idea of 'swaraj' which he did not wish to be translated into simply 'home rule' and so eventually retained it as 'swaraj'.

Sufism as a philosophy emerged and flourished in a multilingual and multi-religious environment of the Sindh region, argues Rita Kothari, when the *pirs* (Sufi teachers-masters) translated Sufi theology via stories of love from the languages and religions of Sindh, Punjab and Gujarat. Sufi thought was never restricted to any one language and was always already hybridized. Localization and hybridization refused the status of an original text, or perhaps even an originary moment, notes Kothari. This was precisely its strength, existing in a 'zone of liminality where identities are simultaneously Hindu and Muslim, or perhaps neither in exclusive terms' (p. 129).

The second essay on Sufism, from Parzaneh Farahzad, demonstrates how European translations misrepresented Sufi theology and belief system and rendered it something else altogether. Sufism, when appearing in translations of Persian and Arabic texts, was rendered a 'romantic theology and a rather passive practice' (p. 139). The sensuous and the exotic were underscored while the non-sensuous was ignored. Similarly the key concept of '*sabr*' (patience) was interpreted as 'tolerance' and thus enabled the translations to suggest a doctrine of 'permissiveness and nonchalance' (p. 141).

Theresa Hyun's essay on the translations of Indian poetry—Tagore and Sarojini Naidu—in colonial Korea notes that Korean culture's 'enrichment' was taken to be linked to the import of masterpieces of world literature. Aware of the limitations of the Korean language to achieve this, the translators tried their hand at various interpretive and writing strategies. Surveying a massive range of Tagore and some Naidu translations, Hyun shows how new writing styles and genres such as children's literature emerged in Korean literature as a result of these localized translations.

One of modern India's distinguished linguist, critic and translator, A.K. Ramanujan is the subject of Sherry Simon's essay. Ramanujan, conscious of being situated between India and the 'West', saw translation as an act of voluntary affiliation with traditions, rather than any unconditional or 'natural' lineages with them, argues Simon. Emerging out of his sensibility as an Indian poet in English and an awareness of the role of English-language poetry, Ramanujan's translation theory also sought to highlight the role of 'outsiders', like (the) English, to the literary and linguistic traditions of the subcontinent. His translations foreground the plurality and 'historical hybridity of Indian society' (p. 170).

Judy Wakabayashi shifts the scene to Japanese translations. Wakabayashi develops an argument about 'J-translation', defined as the Japan-specific nature' of the very concept of translation. Examining a variety of terms and concepts, Wakabayashi offers also a historical review of the modes of translation in Japan. Thus in the 19th century the dominant mode of translation was a form of 'language softening', to make foreign texts easy to understand by Japanese readers, closely followed by a process of 'flipping over' which meant both to invert Japanese cultural beliefs and assumptions through the translation of the foreign text, but also to reveal the 'inside' of the European text but from a different perspective.

The Langalibalele trial in Natal 1874, notes Stanley Ridge in his intriguing essay, shows the link between language, translation, colonialism and the law, and demonstrates how colonial discourse, imperial discourses and the discourses of Zulu society contest in the complex linguistic dynamics of English and Zulu languages. Myths of the loss of imperial prestige emerge in colonial discourses about the Zulus' behaviour, even as Zulu statements, in 'picturesque local colour' in what was 'customary Zulu procedure' at the trial are 'offered … at face value without any sense of their being in a genre remote from that of the British courtroom' (p. 201). Bishop Colenso's appeal was an attempt to point out how Langalibalele had been deliberately mistranslated by the British for their purposes.

This detailed summary of *Decentering Translation Studies: India and Beyond* was intentional to show the range of the volume. The essays, from Ramakrishnan's analysis of the construction of social-cultural identity through specific translation strategies to Ridge's examination of how translation was a matter of life and death for natives in the colonial era, demonstrate multiple traditions of translation. Local politics, cultural assumptions and cultural needs—whether the need is of Korea to find new literary styles or demonstrating the superiority of brahminical-Sanskrit literature—informed translations. Translations achieved *political* ends, as most essays demonstrate conclusively, in Gandhi, the Wahabis or the Sufis.

In most edited collections the contributors merrily do the exact opposite of the editor's *stated* aims that are then 'translated' by bewildered readers as mere fantasies. The present volume is a departure from this hoary tradition. The variety, the theoretical rigour and the commitment to the volume's agenda, of decentering western translation studies/theories make it a pleasure and rewarding experience even for a non-translation studies person like me (but after reading the volume one wonders whether such a species exists at all). By offering a set of alternatives to the western theories of translation, Wakabayashi and Kothari, and their contributors, carve a niche for the native, the provincial, the local and therefore, to extrapolate from this inventory, the postcolonial itself.

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