

होता. त्याचा रोष तो शिरवडयावर काढी. कारण या गावने शपथेवर मतदान केलेच नाही.”¹⁶

(Thergaon approached closer. With the goons of this village, the M.L.A. had blocked the road for Varivade – Shirvade - Pargoan. Once he was defeated in the election by five hundred votes. He avenged Shirvade for this defeat, for this village did not vote with vow in the election.)¹⁶

Again the novel shows the use of the government machinery by politicians not so much for development and constructive works but for taking personal revenge on others and pulling others' legs, due to which, even a very simple and religious persons like Pandurang have to suffer a lot, as the writer says,

“देवकीच्या दिराला मुंबईतच दारू नि जुगाराचा बाद लागला. त्याचे वजंवर कर्ज भागवून पांडुरंगाने त्याला गावी आणला. त्याचे लग्न करून दिले. त्याला बॅरलने दारू पुरवाया उसाच्या मळ्यात मळीची दारू काढाय भट्टी लावायची सोय केली. एका वर्षी कुणीतरी चाड झाले. विरुध्द पार्टीच्या पुढाऱ्यांनी पोलीसांना रेड टाकाय लावली. वारकरी पांडदाच्या हातात भावासाठी बेड्या पडल्या.”¹⁷

(Devaki's brother-in-law became habitual of drinking and gambling in Mumbai. Pandurang paid his huge debt and brought him back to his village ; arranged his marriage. To supply him wine by barrels, he built a wine kiln in his sugarcane farm. But one year someone did mischief and opposition party leaders compelled police to raid the kiln. Pandudada a devoted varkari, was handcuffed for his brother.)¹⁷

This kind of criticism of Indian Politics and Politicians in both novels shows the degradation of Indian politics and also the need of proper political awareness of different things among the people to improve it for better future. Thus, from the above discussion we can see that the post-modern novel *Ichhamaran* has created a large space for folkloric intertextuality. This indigenous folkloric intertextuality shows native cultural affiliation of the writer, whereas the modernist text *The English Teacher* gives a very less space to folk culture or tries to exclude it and so it proves to some extent, that modernism as an armed version of colonialism was against indigenous lore and condemned it as backward. It also proves that the most of the Brahmin writers are alienated from the folk culture as they may consider it unsuitable to their elite class. If we think about the use of language in both novels, it can be pointed out the protagonist in *The English Teacher* is much more westernized as compared to the protagonist in *Ichhamaran*. The protagonist in “The English Teacher” uses simple English without any flavor of Tamil or any other Indian language. But in *Ichhamaran*, the protagonist uses a very simple Marathi and whenever he goes to his village Shirvade, he communicates in rural dialect with the rustic people. This indicates that the protagonist in *Ichhamaran* has deeper attachment with native culture and native land than the protagonist in *The English Teacher*. Again the study of both novels reveals that, the process of creative writing in our country is conditioned by the framework of the caste and the attitude of writer is generally dominated by the ideology of his caste which makes a great difference.

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Thread your beads in the Bright of a Bolt: Translating Ganga sati's *Bhakti* into English

- Hemang Desai

Abstract: In multilingual and multicultural Indian context, translation is understandably a practice that diffuses tensions of different kinds. One such crushing tension that was diffused in the late fifties and sixties of twentieth century in the realm of Indian English poetry related to dialectic of authentic literary language and cultural representation which overlapped with the older tussle between tradition and modernity. Bi-lingual Indian English poets like Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra and A. K. Ramanujan were as active translators as they were poets. Translations, which for them was a link between past and present, self and the other, tradition and modernity, enabled them to create a unique idiom to depict existential realities surrounding them. If the immediate language of their poetry was a product of complex transactions between bhajans and blues, folk music and jazz, rhythm of vernacular and rock & roll, their translations also reflected this radical hybridization of literary language. And proving all surmises wrong, they have worked for readers of all space and time. In this paper, I have tried examine how the model of translation espoused by these poet-translators has helped me in translating bhajans of medieval Gujarati Bhakti poetess Ganga sati. My contention is that if translation has to bestow “after-life” on the works of art, it can be done only by contemporizing and not archaizing the tradition.

Keywords: Translation, bhakti poetry, tradition, modernism, Indian English poetry, idiom, hybridity.

“I can relate to it (bhajans), perhaps because it's an area where some of the world's best poetry – the bhakti poetry – meets folk music. It's people's music, rather than musician's music, joyous noise and it's for everybody” -Arun Kolatkar, (quoted in Zecchini, 2014: 77)

Translating Bhakti: Much more than being a happy co-incidence, the fact that almost all modern Indian poets were also active translators has to be explained on a premise that for a bi-lingual writer, poetry and translation always form a part of the larger continuum of creativity; the two exercises are not mutually exclusive but complementary to each other. By personal experience of being a bi-lingual poet, writing in Gujarati and English, I can vouchsafe with a certain degree of confidence and clarity that the challenges and rewards bestowed by the act of translation have enabled the poet in me to negotiate a unique and complex cultural interstice which has its exclusive epiphanies to offer. On the flip side of this delight lies - and I would be vindicated by none other than Dilip Chitre here- the challenge of showing “them who my Shakespeare, my Racine, my Dostoevsky were” (Chitre, 1998), of defining the native tradition without pledging a blind allegiance to Western literary canon. Such a subversive post-colonial edge of translation practice is continuous with a profound desire to relate and reposition one's self, largely constituted by discourses of western

modernity, to the pre-colonial rich traditional heritage or as Kolatkar puts it, "... to reclaim everything I consider my tradition." (de Souza, 1999) Diachronically, the medium and idiom of Indian modernism was a corollary of constant and complex transactions and miscegenation between English and regional languages, sustained and strengthened by an intimate engagement with and translations of bhakti literature by poets like Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra and A. K. Ramanujan. The little magazines of the era carried English poetry of the contemporary young poets and their translations of bhakti poetry simultaneously. This straddling of the past and present, contemporaries and ancestors, indigenous and alien had a unique implication for literary historiography on the one hand and reflected, on the other, a two-dimensional "secular Indian sensibility to which the rejection of Indigenous culture and religion, relegating them to the realm of superstition and irrationality, would be an important act on the one hand; as would, on the other, its recovery of that very culture as a life-giving, if perennially problematic part of itself" (Chaudhuri, 2008). Amit Chaudhuri here beautifully identifies the essential hybridity and paradoxes of Indian subjectivity which is unequivocally the product of the concurrence of oppositions and contradictions. Here an attempt is made to spell out the challenges and problems encountered and strategies employed to resolve them while I tried to locate my praxis within the above-mentioned conceptual framework.

Historicizing Ganga sati: Before taking a peep into the life and works of Ganga sati, it may be mentioned categorically that as in case of other Bhakti writers like Mirabai or Surdas, issues of historicity and authenticity complicate and problematize any narrative of the poetess's person and production. Whatever is known of Ganga sati today is through "received tradition" i.e. handed down through a chain of folklore, bhajans and oral narratives that exchanged hands and tongues over generations being interpolated, improvised and interpellated on the way and even after the time someone decided to textualize it. Unsurprisingly, there are different versions and contradicting accounts of the text and context of the great bhakti poet, so much so that some studies show her living in the late nineteenth century while others reduce the corpus of her bhajans to the half of what she allegedly produced. Be it as it may, but the fact remains that today Ganga sati's bhajans remain a powerful presence, almost the centrepiece of cultural memory, in all Gujarati households to such an extent that, at least in Saurashtra, a peninsular region of western India on the Arabian Sea coast of Gujarat where she was born, listening to her bhajans every morning is a ritual believed to ward off evil and dark forces from the lives and houses of the devout listeners for whom conundrums of authenticity and history are best left for the brainstorming and hair-splitting of academics and researchers. Thus, it would be more productive and gratifying to approach Ganga sati as a living, breathing, singing tradition than as an isolated singular bhakti poetess straitjacketed in a historical pigeonhole. Such a methodology would naturally compel one to reconsider and readjust one's critical tools and analytical compass, but evidently critical models applied to the

analysis of literature are woefully inadequate to gauge the depth and range of what Dilip Chitre has come to call 'orature'. In 1947, Zaverchand Meghani edited 41 bhajans of Ganga sati from the manuscript of 51 bhajans he received from Nanubhai Dudhrejiya and published them in his book titled *Sorathi Santvani* (1947). Later other editors like Sunanda Vahora and Keshavlal Sayalkar added a few more to the existing corpus of fifty-one, thus making the tally reach fifty-seven. Later scholars like Bhandev and others suggested that the most of later additions differed from the first manuscript in terms of style and themes and placed the definitive tally at 52 representing the fifty-two discourses Ganga sati gave to Paanbai for fifty-two days. Thus, to serve as source texts for my translations of Ganga sati's bhajans, I have relied primarily on *Ganga sati nuAdhyatma Darshan* (The Spiritual wisdom of Ganga sati, 1997) by Bhandev. What follows is a brief life-sketch of Ganga sati drawn with the help of colours and hues from the received tradition.

Ganga sati and Bhakti: In Hindu philosophical and religious traditions, *Moksha* or liberation from the cycle of births and deaths is an overarching trope. Bhakti movement which forms a significant part of the Medieval period (700 CE – 1700 CE) also aspires for deliverance in its own unique style and system. Bhakti poetry juxtaposes the Romantic and (post)modernist dimensions of lyric poetry by bringing about a brilliant concourse of ferocious intensity of experience, an inclination towards the illogical bordering on abstract, expression through powerful, disquieting and often contradictory images and an urge for freedom from social norms and forms imposed by institutionalized social and religious systems. Within this avant-garde tradition, scholars have segregated poets on the basis of whether the addressee of the poem is a personalized deity, the God in a human form like Vishnu, Shiva and Shakti, i.e. *saguna* or a non-figurative, attributeless divine principle, to be experienced mystically and hence *nirguna*. Ganga sati's bhajans largely fit into the nirguna tradition as she doesn't directly invoke any specific deity in the Hindu pantheon (though there are a few poems wherein she instructs Paanbai to worship 'Hari' and 'Govind' which are appellations of Krishna), but the ultimate Brahman, the formless, all-pervasive spirit which animates all beings. The discursive common denominator in all her bhajans remains an unflinching devotion and selfless surrender to this ultimate reality which is necessary for the union of the soul of the devotee with that of the Almighty. The themes of her poetry range from "the importance of Guru, the foundations of spiritual practice, the everyday life of a devotee, the nature of bhakti, words and their mystic nature, yoga, spiritual training and the grace of the guru." (Suthar, 2004: 293) Her bhakti poetics celebrates the importance of an ideal Sadguru (spiritual mentor) in the life a devotee, a Guru who can lead the disciple down the path of truth by developing in him/her qualities like abstinence, conquest of ego and desires, undivided focus on the attainment of God etc. India has a long-standing tradition of *guru-shishya* (teacher-disciple) and the significance that Ganga sati assigns to the role of a guru brings her bhakti pretty close to Kabir's (15th century ca.) who in one of his famous *dohas* has likened a guru to a potter who relentlessly taps with one hand the pot from outside

while supporting it with the other from inside and thus imparts it symmetry and shape.

Translation of Ganga sati's Bhajans: Issues and Itinerary: Such sections inspire a sense of déjà vu in scholars as they blandly launch into theoretical disquisitions on clichéd, however not irrelevant, dialectics of literal and liberal, faithful and unfaithful, domesticated and foreignized that has surrounded the act of translation for around two millennia. While aspiring for clear-cut, definitive and monolithic answers in this regard is surely overambitious, I, for one, have come to believe, particularly in the context of English translation of bhakti poetry, that the ethos and esthetics of Bhakti can best be captured when the ideology, poetics and language that inspire and charge the source texts arrest the target texts. Aijaz Ahmed has made a very pertinent statement in this regard when he tries to outline the discursive kernel of Bhakti movement as a whole.

Bhakti had been associated, on the whole with an enormous democratization of literary language; had pressed the cultural forms of caste hegemony in favour of the artisans and peasants...was ideologically anti-brahminical; had deeply problematized the gender construction of all dialogic relations. (1992:273)

The point is that such a radically progressive poetry can best be rendered in a proverbially hegemonic language like English by a clever employment of strategies at the level of ideological, sociological and poetic aspects of language equally radicalized. There may be nothing avant-garde about this model and it may be absolutely ineffective in contexts where translation is envisaged as a tool of other shades of interventions, but it seems to have worked in well-acclaimed and popular translations of bhakti poetry undertaken by poets like Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre, A. K. Mehrotra, A. K. Ramanujan and Ranjit Hoskote from languages like Marathi, Hindi, Tamil, Kannada and Kashmiri. The overarching strategies and techniques that constitute the dynamics of this model can be noticed in the comparative analysis of the translations of Ganga sati's famous bhajan "*Meru re dage...*" by Nita Ramaiya and me below. The bhajan tries to define the traits of an ideal devotee or *harijan* (Gandhi's location of the term in the political discourse against the canker of untouchability traced its origin to sixteenth century Gujarati bhakti poet Narsinh Mehta. However, the first use of the contested term dates back to Ganga sati in this bhajan.)

Oh, the Meru mountain may be swayed, but not the mind of the Harijan
Let the whole universe be shattered into fragments
But the mind uncorroded by misfortune –
That's the true measure of the Harijan
Oh brother, this is one unaffected by joy and sorrow
Whose head is willingly offered in sacrifice
Who shows courage in adhering to the true Guru's teachings
Who surrenders the ego in full submission.
Oh brother, this is the one who lives in the company of the enlightened
Who rejoices all hours of the day
Who doesn't waver between resolutions and counterresolutions
Who has broken all the bonds of worldly life
- (Translation by Nita Ramaiya in *Women Writing in India*)

Among many problematic aspects this translation has, its sheer prosaic language leaps upto the attention of the reader most prominently. While interjections like 'oh', and 'oh brother' catapults the wonderful modernist poetry into Victorian era, abundance of relative clauses, coinages like 'uncorroded' and 'counterresolutions' make the reading hobbled, if not awful. "Word of advice" can best be reserved for primary classroom settings and parenting contexts as it doesn't have any place in the poetics of mystical and spiritual experiences. Other major faux pas of the translation is the carelessness with which it imparts patriarchal context, by using 'Oh brother', to the original poem which was address to a woman. Gender roles here get inadvertently reinforced, reiterating the stereotype of bhakti as an exclusive masculine domain in a male-dominated society. Finally, the translation mistranslated motifs like 'vachan' as 'teachings' which has deep thematic relationship to non-dualistic philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. *Vachan* refers to one of the several *Mahavakyas* (Great Utterances) like *Aham Brahmasmi* (I am Brahman) or *Tatvamasi* (that thou art) available in Chhandogya, Mandukya, Brihadaranyaka, Aitariya and other Upanishads which is formally imparted by Guru to his disciple at the time of his/her initiation into rigorous spiritual training. In my translation, I have tried to resolve some of these issues by using colloquial language, depending on the immediate and even abrupt and, most importantly, keenly following the music of the original.

Mounts may rock, for once
Cosmos may come crashing
But heart of a harijan won't give way
Be it the most torrid of times.
Hiccups of spirits, low and high,
Can't get her, Satguru's *svachan* is
A beacon to the braveheart
Selfless, she lays down her life
The company of the wise
Gives her a high, all day and night
Without a care for resolves and routes
Vicious is maya's hex, snap out of it

Admittedly, the most fundamental challenge that stares the translator of bhakti literature in face is the uneasy dilemma of the source text. Essentially an orature that underwent a systemic shift in the hands of a well-meaning scribe, bhakti poetry has never been an exclusive verbal or lexical art but shared interconnections with other cultural forms like music, dance and ritual. Understandably, when Ganga sati's bhajans got inscribed on a piece of paper, they were translated into another realm of being altogether. "With this act the poem was detached from the drum skin, the buzzing string of the *ektar* or *tambura*, the dancer's foot, or the community reciting its refrain back to the poet." (Schelling, 2011:xxii) Even the Gujarati originals that I used as source texts abound in features that define a performative text i.e. rhyme, rhythm, word music, homonyms, puns, refrains and an entire gamut of techniques of folk music that enhance the resonance and melodiousness of a text. These phonetic features of a literary text, which Rudrata (9th Century ca.), an

eminent Kashmiri poetician in the line of Bhamaha, Dandin and Anandvardhana, classified as *shabdalanekar* (ornament of sound) account for much of the aesthetic appeal of an artefact as against the *arthalanekar* (ornament of meaning) like simile, metaphor, hyperbole etc. which intensify its semantic component. Evidently, a translator negotiating two disparate languages like Gujarati and English with diametrically different poetics and phonetics has to depend more often than not on the latter since replication of the former is will-o-the-wispish.

However, enterprise of translation has more to it than the lachrymose breast-beating over the strangling of live sparrows and mummification of dead eagles. Even at the risk of mouthing a cliché, the translator is a creator in his/her own right, a vector of power and life to the target texts in ways that are subtle and explicit, esthetical and ideological. That's probably what A. K. Mehrotra hints at when he makes a radical statement like "Originals are just an impediment, just a roadblock which somehow have to be put aside." (2011). Far from being a radical and subversive position too theoretical to be implementable in practice, this contention points towards a mechanism through which the apparent difficulties in translation can be circumvented and a progressive model be conceived. To quote Dilip Chitre, "If the target text is only an attempt to create a model of the source text, then every aspect of the source text becomes equally sacrosanct and translation becomes obviously impossible." (1991: xv) The notion of possibility which is so integral to the enterprise of translation, both conceptually and psychologically, presupposes the imagining of target text as an "autonomously functioning whole" in a linguistic space and time which do not correspond to those of source text. The only aspect of translation for which a translator can be held accountable consequently is a somewhat direct and perfect comprehension and transmission of the way the source text functions; the rest of the poem should be allowed to evolve beyond the realm of accountability and accuracy. Chitre captures this idea beautifully when says,

In fact, our contemporary translation of Tukaram must make his work appear here and now, yet suggesting also that it is really out there... so that Tukaram remains a seventeenth century Marathi Bhakta-poet in English translation, and not a jeans-and-jacket-clad European talking of mystical illumination in India. (1991:xxiii)

Kolatar, Chitre and of late Mehrotra have accomplished this paradox of existence of medieval poets by a conscious and clever employment of a number of strategies ranging from a blatant refusal to follow the printed word to manipulation of modern-day idiom, chutneyfication of multiple idioms and registers, and a judicious use of even slang, neologisms and anachronisms to suit their mystical needs. Use of this hybrid idiom to treat the poetry of Bhakti poet-singers situates the praxis of these established translators in the long-standing tradition of what in case of Kabir was called *panchmelkhichri*, a kedgerie cooked with five kinds of grains or holy argot. (Mehrotra, 2008) An Indian English poet like Agha Shahid Ali stole thoughts from many minds when he articulated a paradox specific to Indian English writer who both consciously and unconsciously undertakes the 'biryanization' of English in his

works.(quoted in 1992: 4) This alleged hybridization involves the dual process of what Rushdie undertook in the name of 'chutneyfication' i.e. innovative reconfiguration of syntax along with freewheeling creolization of English and what Ali called, catching the echoes of Urdu music in English. However, in addition to this two-dimensional chutneyfication model, my praxis was influenced significantly by certain simplicity of language and crispness of expression which powerfully characterised the Indian English literature in late nineties of the last century and the new millennium. I tend to concur with Amitav Ghosh who lauded Arundhati Roy on the occasion of her winning of Booker Prize for her deft wielding of the tool of chutneyfication only to qualify his accolades with a cautious preference for simplicity in the context of his own literary practice. (quoted in Ghosh, 1997) Since a blind imitation of the way Ganga sati's bhajans are represented visually stood in the danger of producing a stiff, awkward and laborious translation, a decision had to be taken to locate the translation in the time-tested performative tradition, to sing out the bhajans pulsating with a distinct music of folk Gujarati. A. K. Mehrotra has summed this up beautifully when he says,

For the singer, the pada was not something whose words had unalterably been fixed, to be slavishly followed while singing, but something that was provisional and fluid, a working draft, whose lines and images could be shifted around, or substituted by others, or deleted entirely. (2012: 286)

This swaying music of the most vibrant literary form of Gujarati literary tradition sought to find reference points and chords of alignment in the peculiar music of modernist English poetry that reached me through Ginsberg, William Carlos Williams, e.e.cummings and the Indian modernist poets they hugely influenced. What followed, then, was a fresh and exuberant concourse of styles, idioms and music of diverse literary traditions, a postmodernese smorgasbord or tantalizing potpourri, that entailed a constant improvisation here and ad-libbing there just for the sake of capturing what constitutes the identity of a bhakti poem i.e intimacy of tone, poetic singsong, immediacy of expression and thrill of spontaneity. However, it remains to be admitted that while trying to implement this discourse radically, the translations begins to appear strange at times in the sense that it 'sounds' unenglish, predated, self-conscious and so on. However, this has to be accepted as a part of the package deal of pleasure the process undeniably delivers as "a translated poem is at best, an intimate stranger among its counterparts in the target language." (Chitre, 1991: xvi)

In case of Ganga sati's poems, the major difficulties that threatened to crush the translated poems relate to carry-over of conceptual and philosophical details. Grounded in the philosophy of Advaita Vendanta, Ganga sati's bhajans reiterate the non-duality of Atman and Brahman and stresses the attainment of 'vidya' (knowledge) that would eventually lead the soul tomoksha. Now the intricate process of attaining the knowledge involves phases of exercises that involves yogic intertwining of the pace and frequency of respiration with metaphysical contemplation of the 'vachan'. In one of her bhajans, Ganga sati quotes the ideal frequency of yogic respiratory exercise at twenty-one thousand and six