

## Editorial

# Interrogating Cultural Translation

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‘Cultural translation’, a much debated and contested topic in Postcolonial studies as well as in Translation studies, in a way, is symptomatic of the postmodern problematisation of cultural identities. Translation Studies has reached a critical juncture where the attempt to ‘translate a culture’, invariably, leads to arguments on the appropriation involved in any type of discourse. Rather, when we discuss the accuracy of cultural representation through translation, it becomes an opening to contest the cultural appropriation that has been taken for granted in discourses in general. Similarly, in postcolonial studies, ‘cultural translation’ has garnered academic attention since the publication of Homi K Bhabha’s essay “How Newness Enters the World: Postmodern space, postcolonial times and the trials of cultural translation” wherein he stresses the ‘translational’ nature of postcolonial discourse and identity construction. Both these perspectives can be placed within a broader postmodern/post structural approach of doubting certainties and being radically open to the ‘other’. In this sense, ‘cultural translation’ is an umbrella term which signifies the ‘in-between’ state of the cultural transactions of our times, across genres and disciplines. The nuanced thought on conceptualising culture is also significant for the fact that it is a counter-narrative to the institutionalised ‘othering’ which has gone to ridiculous levels in this post-truth age of digital media and social networking sites. It is in this context that the international conference on “Interrogating Cultural Translation: Literature and Fine Arts in Translation” organised by Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham in association with Caesurae Collective, placed ‘cultural translation’ within an interdisciplinary framework and thus, facilitated the discussion of the topic touching upon its varied implications.

The term ‘cultural translation’ was popularised by renowned Anthropologist Talal Azad who used it to refer to the element of translation involved in the anthropological study of a culture. Since then this thought has come a long way and has evolved into a layered concept which has implications for most of the disciplines in Humanities and Social Sciences. The framework the special issue adopts is anchored on three points – 1. Homi K Bhabha’s conception of ‘cultural translation’ and the impact that it had in Postcolonial studies; 2. Harish Trivedi’s critique of the topic; 3. The interdisciplinary nature of this concept. Bhabha’s theoretical position is completely in line with the poststructuralist approach that he has always adopted in his deliberations on political and cultural issues. For him, cultural translation is not a limited linguistic process that happens in the translation of a literary work from one language to another. He sees it as a process of bringing ‘newness into the world’ by keeping its attention on the ‘performative nature of

differential identities: the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually, contingently, 'opening out', remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference – be it class, gender or race.' (Bhabha 219) Harish Trivedi makes a strong critique of this approach in his article, "Cultural Translation vs. Translating Culture". To argue that translation is a process that is part of all cultural exchanges, for Trivedi, amounts to an attempt to produce a neutral, mono-lingual cultural discourse – a discourse wherein socio-cultural nuances get submerged in an all pervasive textuality. So he finds that there is an 'urgent need to protect and preserve some little space in the postcolonial-postmodernist world, where newness constantly enters through cultural translation, for some old-fashioned literary translation'(Trivedi). This debate, on the one hand, is about basic questions such as 'what is translation?' while on the other, it opens some of the most problematic and contested topics in cultural and literary theory such as subjectivity, agency, representation etc.

The issue, true to the eclectic nature of the topic, is quite a diverse one – the genres/disciplines discussed here include cinema, fiction, poetry, travel writing, English Language Teaching, Linguistics, and Gender Studies; the geographies explored comprise Chile, Nigeria, United States, Sri Lanka, and India. S Rajendran's paper "Using Untranslatable Dictions as a Literary Device" elucidates how the use of Indian terms for which there are no equivalents in English, become a literary device in many of the novels by Indian English writers. Mandeep Boro, in his paper, "Deconstructing Culture/Violence in *Distant Star* and *By Night in Chile*", looks into the enmeshing of violence and cultural beliefs in Roberto Bolano's novels and tries to bring home the way such a portrayal challenges literary establishments. "Mapping the Contours of a Tempestuous Interiority: Reading Kamala Das through Kristeva", a paper by Sandhya V, Hari M G, and Harini Jayaraman discusses the works of Kamala Das in the light of Julia Kristeva's thoughts on the points of convergences and divergences of psyche and language. It analyses Das's depiction of feminine subjectivity by bringing out the disruptions that female 'semiotic' urges make in the, arguably, patriarchic system of signification, the 'symbolic'. Arpana Venu and Harini Jayaraman, in their paper "Translating the Travelled Culture: An Analysis of *Tamarind City: Where Modern India Began* by Bishwanath Ghosh" reflect on the intra-cultural transformations of Madras over many centuries. D Sudha Rani's paper "Image of America in Telugu Cinema: A Study of Cultural Implications" discusses the cultural translation involved in the depiction of the American way of life in Telugu Cinema. T Asha Priya and B Jayasridevi, in their paper, "Integrating Translation in Classrooms: Facilitating Language Skills", deliberates on the efficacy of translation as a teaching method in English language Teaching. Karthika Unnnithan and Harini Jayaraman, in their paper, "Entwining *Omenala* and *Samskara*: An Indo-Nigerian Ethnographic Study of Buchi Emecheta's Fiction", seeks to bring out the parallels and differences that the African cultural practices depicted in Buchi Emecheta's novels have with Indian culture. Bibhuti Mary Kachap and Aju Aravind discuss the ethnic roots of nationalism in the context of Sri Lankan civil war in their paper, "Revisting Ethno-nationalism: A Study of Nihal de Silva's *The Road from Elephant Pass*". Pallavi Kiran's paper, "English Transference of Hindustani: A Pragmatic- Stylistic Study of Gulzar's Poetry", delves into the nuances of cultural translation involved in the translation of Gulzar's poetry into English. Promod Nayar, in his article, "Literature (Now) Contains Graphic Language: Adaptation, Visualisation, and Transmedia Texts", puts forward a new and original argument regarding the adaptation of literature to visual forms. Adaptation, for Nayar, involves intertextuality and its significance can be pinned down to one factor: the intertextual 'literary influence' seen in adaptations across genres, irrespective of whether the content of the source text gets altered. So, he argues that adaptation is basically an 'instantiation of literary influence'.

Despite the differences in content and approach, the articles included in this issue have the common thread of critically looking at the way cultural identity gets negotiated in language. Even in the ones that deal with the technicalities of translation, there is an active attention to the cultural significations involved. Together, they put forward a narrative – a narrative that is pitched against the missing grey shades in all absolute claims on culture, history, and identity, literary conventions etc.

**References:**

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