

## Review Article

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### **New Perspectives on Translation: *Translating Odisha* by Paul St-Pierre**

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*Translating Odisha* (2019) by Prof. Paul St-Pierre fetches a wide range of new perspectives on translation and the act of translating with specific reference to translations from and to Odia. Being a Professor of Linguistics and Translation Studies, and at the same time a prolific translator, St-Pierre produces a rare combination of theory and application. He invokes and applies translation theories even as he theorises the experience of translating. Through three decades of association with Odia literature and its historiography and through translations with collaborators, St-Pierre has become an authority on translation studies in Odisha. His recent book is mostly a compilation of the articles that he has published in different journals of international repute, papers that he has presented in conferences and seminars, and a few short occasional pieces.

Beginning with a personal note on Translation Studies in Section I, St-Pierre goes on to unravel in Section II the socio-cultural history of Odisha with his meticulous readings of dates and years of translation. In Section III, he addresses the mechanics and politics of translation as a cultural practice. Section IV offers an experimental analysis of the mechanics, challenges and the cultural discourse of translation with specific reference to *Chha Mana Atha Guntha* (1902) by Phakirmohan Senapati. Section V comprises short write-ups mediating St-Pierre's views on the Odia writer JP Das. A collection of occasional short pieces are included in Section VI. Section VII contains an exhaustive list of the translations on which St-Pierre has collaborated.

Reading *Translating Odisha* is an illuminating experience as this book makes an attempt to perform a two-fold task; first, it tries to redefine translation as a species of creative as well as critical art, situating it in the context of Odisha, and, second, it reads Odisha and literatures in Odia anew in the light of translation. The book thus becomes a splendid document of Odia history, culture, language and literature. One of the elements that makes this book so engrossing is the extensive analysis of data and statistics on translations from and to Odia, covering a period close to two centuries. Analysing 2400 translations from 1807 to 1995, he reflects upon the changing patterns of translation and its socio-intellectual dynamics. St-Pierre sets down the number of translated texts and puts these into three periods, the taxonomy is revealing, speaking of the changing social and literary paradigms in Odisha. In the first period, he shows how translations in the mid nineteenth century were carried out in the spheres of education, administration and

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religion mostly as a way of promoting the colonial agenda of Macaulay. Along with this he also tries to understand the dynamics of utilising translation as a tool of colonial administration and the missionary ambitions of the church. However, though begun as an abettor of the colonial agenda, translations done in the first decade after the Independence of India bring in a paradigm shift, both in the number and nature of translations in Odisha. This is the second period. St-Pierre points out that translation of 180 texts between 1947 and 1957 is a phenomenal increase in the volume of translation, exceeding the number of translations in the last 140 years by 50 percent. He states, "This rapid increase in translation is a phenomenon that merits analysis; it is as if the independence of the nation opened a floodgate to other languages and cultures" (St-Pierre, 2019 p. 60). With this opening of the floodgates the translation of religious texts declined and translations of literary texts increased. The third period, ranging from 1965 to 1995, is significant for Odisha as these three decades of translation mark an evident shift in the choice of source language from European to Indian. Indian language texts getting translated into Odia is indicative of new equations for Odia literature. Moreover, increase in the translation of Russian texts during the 1970s marks the rise in new political relations of India with USSR, resulting in the influx of Marxists intellectual currents into Odia literary culture.

Thus St-Pierre's data and statistics do not just play with numbers and tables; rather they try to quantify the qualitative changes in the Odia society. In his attempt to understand the history of Odisha through translations he suggests, "Translations constitute signs, or more specifically 'symptoms', of the way in which a society is defining itself through its contacts with other societies" (St-Pierre, 2019 p. 110) and thus he believes that examining the "translations carried out into a particular language can lead to the establishment of trends that make it possible to characterize the evolution of a society over time" (St-Pierre, 2019 p. 110). He maps the evolution of the Odia society over a period of two hundred years from 1807 to 2004 and broadly classifies it into four phases; a) Transforming Odisha; b) Reinforcing Odia identity; c) Internationalizing Odia literature; d) Connecting Odisha to India. This close reading of translations facilitates an account of the evolution of Odisha, the consolidation of its identity and projecting this identity to the global readership with a view to making Odia literature a part of the global literary discourse and at the same time an indispensable part of Indian literatures in translation.

Apart from reading the history of Odisha through translation, St-Pierre's insights into translation as a genre can immensely help scholars and students of Translation Studies. Beginning with an analysis of a poem by Keats in chapter five, St-Pierre underlines the stereotypes attached to translations and translators. He quotes "'Traduttore, traditore'" – meaning "'All translators are traitors, all translations betray'" and "'Les belles infidèles'" – meaning "translations are beautiful ('belles') but unfaithful ('infidèles')" (St-Pierre, 2019 p. 80). However, he moves beyond these clichés to a positive view of translation by highlighting the French translations of Shakespearean plays where characters were not allowed to die, hence substantially altered. This approach to reading the 'unfaithfulness' of translation brings in a historical perspective to the discourse of translation. Thus a Shakespearean play in Odia translation today ought to suit the new surroundings and in this the 'difference' between the source text and the translated text is inevitable. In St-Pierre's words; "there can indeed not be translation without difference – a change in linguistic form is of the very essence of translation, difference is at the very heart of translation" (St-Pierre, 2019 p. 81).

A translator sits on the fence of two languages and cultures and constantly negotiates between the linguistic and cultural differences to reach a decision that would be acceptable to the readers of the target language as well as to those of the source. Quoting Lawrence Venuti, St-Pierre reintroduces and explicates with examples, the strategies of 'domestication' and 'foreignisation' in translation. For example, translating *Go Dhuli* in Odia to 'dusk' in English may refer to a specific point of time in a day, but it does not evoke the cultural essence of Odia rustic life, and hence the expression 'cow-dust-time' – meaning the time when cattle are herded back to their sheds by a cowherd - aptly foreignises the Odia experience in its English expression. The act of translation thus involves a painstaking exercise and with such meticulous care given to the source text and target text, the process of translating itself becomes a cross-cultural exercise.

St-Pierre's observation is worth quoting in this context. He states, "Translation is a form of discourse – a linguistic event produced by an agent within a specific historical context, and, as such, it is dependent upon laws and rules which determine not only what can be said – can be translated – but also the way it can be expressed" (St-Pierre, 2019 p. 83). He further interrogates the discourse and asks a pertinent question, "What constitutes a translation?" (St-Pierre, 2019 p. 86). This is where he brings in his critical insight and explains why he disagrees with Jatindra Mohanty's view of *Sarala Mahabharata* as an independent work of art. As opposed to Mohanty's view, he considers *Sarala Mahabharata* to be a work of translation, which need not be a 'copy' of the source text, and to substantiate his point he cites two elements that make it a work of translation. He states; "I feel confident in considering it to be a translation, since it carries the same title as a text in Sanskrit that pre-existed it and since it purports to reproduce the fundamental characteristics of that text" (St-Pierre, 2019 p. 86). However, a text like *Laxmi Purana* by Balaram Das, though it sounds like a reproduction of a 'Purana', neither has a Puranic tradition attached to it, nor did it have anything pre-existing in any form in any language, hence it qualifies to be an independent work.

Further, St-Pierre brings in more insights by analysing the 'endogenous' and 'exogenous' natures of translation in the context of Odisha. He classifies three generic moments in Odisha namely, Translations by Christian Missionaries (1807-1866), Translations from Sanskrit (1886-1926) and Post-Independence (1965-2000) to distinguish the endogenous and exogenous natures of translations in Odisha. While doing so he offers fascinating accounts of translation in Odisha. There were some translations that were significantly motivated by the mission of conversion and spread of Marxist ideologies. Moreover, there were translations of more than hundred works of English literature, World literature etc. into Odia that were attributable to the individual efforts of two translators namely, Shridhar Das and Laxmi Narayan Mohanty.

Phakirmohan Senapati's *Chha Mana Atha Guntha* published in 1902 receives a special mention in *Translating Odisha*. In fact Senapati's novel becomes a laboratory in which St-Pierre tests the theories of translation while theorising translation. He brings in passages from all the four translations of *Chha Mana Atha Guntha* (1902), namely *Six Acres and a Half* (2005) by A.M. Senapati and B.M. Senapati, *The Stubble under the Cloven Hoof* (1967) by CVN Das, *A Plot of Land* (1967) by Nuri Mishra and *Six Acres and a Third* (2005) collaboratively by Rabi Shankar Mishra, Satya P. Mohanty, Jantindra K. Nayak and Paul St-Pierre, and explores the 'differences' – the additions and omissions – in the four versions. He also mentions the fifth translation under progress of the same text titled *Six and a Third Acres* with a view to establishing the fact that there

is no absolute translation and all translations, even if it is of the same source text, have their own target objectives and agendas. Apart from Senapati being translated in manifold ways, there are two important aspects that St-Pierre highlights. One, Senapati's significant role in protecting Odia language from the vicious plan for the imposition of Bengali in schools and offices and reinstating Odia as the official language for upholding Odia identity. Two, while analysing Senapati's autobiography titled *Atmacharita* published in 1927 and translated into English as *Story of My Life* (1997) by Jatindra K. Nayak and P. Das he proposes a newer and nuanced discourse on translation. He marks how power and hierarchy can present the manipulative nature of translation and concludes his section on Senapati with the following words:

Mistrusted when he accurately translates, trusted when he deliberately mistranslates, Phakir Mohan embodies here the possibility that translation, and in particular translation in contexts of power and hierarchy, can constitute a form of betrayal, a possibility which in various countries of Europe led to the establishment of institutions – schools of oriental languages – to train their citizens as translators and interpreters and thereby avoid the necessity of having recourse to “native” subjects. In both of the cases cited by Phakir Mohan in his autobiography translation is an occasion for misunderstanding; in both cases translation raises the question of what the parties involve actually “share”, of what actually is communicated, of the nature of their “community”. (St-Pierre, 2019 p. 334)

The last two sections of the book broadly deal with commentaries on J.P Das's creative world and occasional short write-ups by St-Pierre respectively. In these two sections the smooth flow of the narrative seems a little troubled. The shift from Senapati to JP Das misses a few connecting dots. However, St-Pierre's readings of the creative world of JP Das – be it poetry or prose in translation, are significant in their own right. His commentaries on Das's write-ups come with a personal touch and reflect his literary association with the author, however, these also suggest the rise of new voices in Odia literatures; not the canons, but the decentred spaces of literatures in Odisha, contemporary and experimental in nature, with JP Das as a model. St-Pierre's short prose pieces introduce us to a wide range of his association with Odisha, its literatures and litterateurs over the last three decades. His association with Odia literature in the context of translation is also evident from the exhaustive list of his publications annexed in the last section.

In the context of the production of the book, a few points could have been taken care of. Firstly, the terminologies like “In this paper” and “This paper” could have been slightly modified to suit the concept of a book, though this book is a compilation of the series of articles that the author has published and presented over the last three decades. Secondly, the use of the terms ‘Orissa’ and ‘Oriya’ in some places could have been replaced with ‘Odisha’ and ‘Odia’ respectively – these being the latest English spellings of the state and the language. Considering the dates of publication of these papers, the spellings mentioned are correct, however, since the book itself is titled *Translating Odisha*, the use of the latest spelling is recommended except in places where these words are quoted from some other sources. Thirdly, the author seems to suggest that Hindi is the national language of India in two different chapters (St-Pierre, 2019 p. 248, 310), whereas Hindi has been given the status of official language in the country so far and the concept of national language in India is still under debate. Fourthly, as far as typographical errors are concerned it can be said of *Translating Odisha* that the errors do exist, but are negligible. Insertion of a wrong form of the word in “does a translate ‘domesticate’” (St-Pierre, 2019 p. 81) instead of

“does a translation ‘domesticate’” is one such example. Likewise, there is the missing punctuation in “Seema his love has been” (St-Pierre, 2019 p. 349). These can of course be rectified in the future edition of the book. Besides, the hardbound copy of the book with a maroon dust-jacket and a graceful cover page produced by ‘Dhaulti Books’ is impressive, reader-friendly and pleasing to the eye.

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