



Research Article

The Rhetorical Uneasiness: A Study of Rebecca Whittington's Translation of Jibanananda Das's *Malloban*

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the translation of socio-cultural and rhetorical nuances of language between Bangla and English with a case of the translation of Jibanananda Das's 1973 novel *Malloban* by Rebecca Whittington in 2022. The act of translating such a rich and culturally nuanced text poses substantial challenges, as it involves the delicate balance of preserving the essence of the source text while making it accessible to a new linguistic and cultural context. In the process, the translator, whose native language is American English, is led to straddle domestication and exoticism, thus creating linguistic, semiotic, and syntactic variations in her rendition of the source language text. This paper attempts to assess the fidelity of the translation to the original work while scrutinizing the translator's choices in capturing the intricate wordplay, colloquial expressions, metaphors, and narrative subtleties that are hallmarks of Jibanananda Das's writing. This paper also examines the instances where the translation may inadvertently alter or dilute the original text's impact and the implications of such alterations for readers of the translated work. Furthermore, this study delves into the emotional and cognitive dimensions of bilingual reading.

Keywords: Translation, Jibanananda, Whittington, Equivalence, challenges, domestication, foreignization, dynamic, reception.

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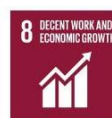
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Introduction

“A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully.” (Benjamin, 1996, p. 260)

Despite being critiqued and evolved over time, faithfulness in translation has often been referred to as fidelity or equivalence. It is still an essential principle of maintaining the integrity, meaning, and essence of the source text in the translated version. As an intricate and ever-evolving practice, translation is a bridge connecting cultures, literary works, and languages. However, despite countless attempts, the original can hardly be reproduced with all its “originality,” whatever that expression may mean. Therefore, whether there is a “correct” translation of a text is a multifaceted question that lingers. The “correctness” depends on the linguistic, semantic, syntactic, ethnographic and political ethos of the source language text and target language text. Within this realm, the Equivalence Theory has long been a guiding principle, advocating for a faithful and meticulous rendition of the source language text into the target language text. It emphasizes the preservation of not only the semantic content but the formal, stylistic, poetic, structural and cultural essence of the original work as well. In the realm of literary translation, this theory is particularly pertinent since it attempts to strike a delicate balance between the preservation of the source text’s artistic integrity and the necessity of adaptation to the linguistic and cultural nuances of the target audience. This paper, through a contrastive reading of Jibanananda Das’s 1973 Bangla novel *Malloban* and Rebecca Whittington’s 2022 English translation of the novel, while using Eugene Nida’s Equivalence theory in translation studies, attempts to show how the art of translation involves a consistent effort on the part of the translator to assimilate the experience of reading the source language text, the understanding of the text in a contemporary milieu while keeping the sociopolitical, cultural and linguistic milieu intact, and the rendition of the text’s ethos with all its narrative nuances, historical hues, metaphorical lucidity or obscurity and linguistic turns. This echoes how Mukherjee (2006) in his essay ‘Translation as Discovery’ posits a translator as a figure who “is tested twice over”, first “in terms of reception” and afterwards on the basis of his or her “command of the two languages involved”, the source language and the target language, “especially, where the latter is concerned, in terms of transmission” (p. 147). This paper will try to situate Whittington as a translator and a receptor in a broader spectrum of transcultural and bilingual readership, with the expansions and limitations of her conscious and unpremeditated choices. Using the nuanced theoretical frameworks of semantic equivalence, this paper will seek to portray how and to what extent Whittington’s *Malloban* succeeds in rendering the essence of the source text yet stumbles somewhere onto certain linguistic challenges and socio-temporal barriers in her translation of Jibanananda Das. However, she claims to have avoided “egregious Americanisms” (Das, 1973/2022, p. xxi). Semantic equivalence, a key concept in translation studies, has two branches: dynamic equivalence and formal equivalence. According to Nida, the latter is a more effective and organic approach to translation. It goes beyond correct communication of information in a certain text (Nida & Taber, 2003, p. 25). Nida emphasized the task of a translator as a receptor-based endeavour (Munday, 2001, p. 42). A translator must keep in mind the time of the source text, the time in the source text, and the time of its translation while not losing sight of the space woven in these different voices of the narrative. Voices and silences, time and space, dynamic contexts of the writer, the translator, and the recipient(s), and the continuous yet often

deferred attempts to keep up the essence of the source language text in the target language text are some of the aspects we will try to explore in this paper.

Before we proceed further into our discussion, it is imperative to contextualize our primary text and the broader literary legacy of Jibanananda Das. Revered as the “Poet of Beautiful Bengal”, Das’s profound influence as a poet transcends geographical boundaries. His poesy has sparked a plethora of discussions and research worldwide. Numerous translations of his work, ranging from his own to renditions by notable figures like Martin Kirkman, Clinton B. Seely, Joe Winter, Buddhadeb Basu, Chidananda Dasgupta, Purushottam Lal, Ananda Lal, and Sukanta Chaudhuri, to name a few, underscore his enduring influence. A new dimension of Das’s narrative artistry has been brought to light very recently with the discovery of his manuscripts, which had long been hidden away in the dark of a trunk. This has prompted a reevaluation of his literary stature. Despite an extensive creative and scholarly engagement with his poetry and its translation, Das’s prose remains a relatively understudied area in academic discourse. This paper aims to address this gap while examining the transformative role of translation in expanding Jibanananda Das’s literary footprint. Das’s career as a novelist can be divided into two distinct phases: the first phase took place in the 1930s, and the second phase took place in the year 1948. Needless to say, the year 1948 has manifold sociopolitical significance in the history of Bengal in particular and India in general. It was the year that followed multiple struggles that led to the independence of India and the partition of Bengal in 1947. This was also the post-Second World War era, an anarchical period that fundamentally transformed the lives and beliefs of people across the globe. With the change in the socio-economic-political milieu of a chronotope, the literary milieu alters itself. In 1946 Jibanananda Das had to migrate to Kolkata from Barisal. In 1948, he wrote four novels relentlessly: *Malloban*, *Sutirtha*, *Jalpaihati*, and *Basmatir Upakhyan*. Unlike the fiction written in the 1930s, these last novels become psychologically more disturbing, linguistically more revolting, thematically more surreal, politically more conscious and eternally unparalleled. *Malloban* was first published posthumously by Newsprint in 1973. For this study, we used the second volume of *Jibanananda Samagra*, published in 1985 and edited by Debesh Ray, as the primary Bangla text. However, as for the in-text citation of the translated text, we have used ‘(Das, 1973/2022, p.)’ format as per the date of the first publication of the Bangla novel and that of the translated one. We have not used ‘(Whittington, 2022, p.)’ format because we intend to show Whittington’s translation not as an independent, separate book but as an extension of Das’s work. The in-text citation in this paper has thus become an important mechanism in the declaration of authorship.

***Malloban* – Reproduction or Recreation?**

The experience of reading *Malloban* in Bangla is linguistically unsettling, philosophically unnerving, and sociopolitically rebelling. It puts into words the linguistic disruptions, metaphorical obscurity, bizarre dreams, apparently absurd conduct, episodes of nausea, and the psychosexual anomalies of *Malloban*, the protagonist. In *Malloban*, Das constructs a discourse and initiates a discussion only to break them all to counter an author’s traditional position as a provider of the logical continuity of events. However, the act of translating such a linguistically rich, philosophically raw and culturally nuanced text poses substantial challenges. The novel is pregnant with structural complexity, narrative eccentricity, and psychological idiosyncrasies, with

numerous points of silence embedded in it. These silent spaces serve as pathways through which the protagonist attempts to cope up with the traumatic disruptions that he faces. Translating *Malloban* thus involves capturing and conveying these silent spaces, as they are integral to the narrative of *Malloban*. A responsible translation maintains the essence of the source text while making it accessible to a new linguistic and cultural context. Context is a key term here to understand the multifaceted role of language, particularly in Jibanananda's work, where, instead of a uniform context, innumerable micro-contexts are constantly in collision with each other. Although Das's narrative may seem sparse in events, tracking these micro-contexts is essential for an effective rendition. In his work *Contexts in Translating*, Nida (2002) comments on the importance of context in meaning-making:

Although language is rightfully described as structurally linear, the understanding of language does not precede in merely one direction. The real meaning of a word may depend on the context that occurs on the following page. Furthermore, fast reading of a text using a system described as "speed reading" depends on assimilating the meaning of a passage by reading successively different portions of a page containing three or four lines at a time. (p. 24)

It is important to note that there is an inherent power relation that is always at work in the process of translation. The dynamics of translation exhibit a movement from languages associated with centers of power to those situated at the periphery (Chatterjee, 2015, translated by the author). Whittington revises this grand narrative of power dynamics in language and translation by delving into the relatively unexplored oeuvre of a Bengali writer primarily known as a poet. It is crucial to note that Whittington's is the sole published English translation of Das's *Malloban*. Her choice to translate *Malloban* springs from her deep emotional connection to the novel, coupled with her unwavering determination to unveil a hidden gem of Bangla literature to a wider readership, while sincerely acknowledging the inherent impossibility of translating Das. In her note on the translation, she states:

This novel adopted me for its own mysterious reasons, like a cat, and I haven't been able to get rid of it since. Knowing that translating Jibanananda is an impossible task, I began working on it in 2009, completed the first draft in 2011, wrote an MA thesis on it in 2013, revised the translation in fits and starts over the years, couldn't resist digressing to write a little more about it in my doctoral dissertation in 2019, began to look at it from a new perspective as my research drew me towards Dalit, Adivasi, and women's literary self-representation, and finally thought seriously about publishing it in 2020 while bird-watching from a Kolkata veranda and on walks around the Lake (Rabindra Sarobar). (Das, 1973/2022, p. xix)

In the course of translating, *Malloban* Whittington says, considering that her native language is American English, "the most challenging aspect of the text for translation is its heavy and often unconventional use of idioms," which has made her "walk a fine line between domestication and exoticism" (Das, 1973/2022, p. xxxi). Her translation appears somewhat constrained by the lingua franca, as her home language is a "family variety of Banglish" (Das, 1973/2022, p. xxi). This way of looking at Whittington's translation does not come from a sense of linguistic and cultural supremacy but from the privilege of being a sociolinguistically aware bilingual reader. However,

in exploring how the translator navigates the cultural references embedded in the novel and seeking to ascertain whether the essence of Bengal's historical and social milieu is accurately conveyed, the deep and dark world of *Malloban* somehow seems to lose its discourse in the translated text. Whittington's translation consciously or inadvertently alters or dilutes the original text's impact. Those alterations might not cause a major issue in the basic understanding of the novel for non-native readers. However, for a reader who had read the novel in Bangla, the rendition comes as more lexically faithful than physically, weakening the colloquial appeal of the original. It retains the literal fidelity, sometimes at the expense of the "physical sensation of linguistic incongruence" of the *Jibananandiya* (Das, 1973/2022, p. xx). We have used the term '*Jibananandiya*' as an adjective derived from Jibanananda's name to refer to the distinctive themes, styles, situations, characterizations, and atmospheres marked by a sense of spectral trauma and looming violence that define the essence of his work. Rebecca Whittington, borrowing terms from Venuti's theory of translation, argues that her translation undertakes a middle ground between domestication and foreignization of the source text, allowing neither to interrupt the intuitiveness and fluidity of the original work (Das, 1973/2022, p. xxi). It is the translator's job to choose between a domesticating strategy that serves to bring the author back home or a foreignizing strategy that attempts to send the reader abroad (Venuti, 2008, p. 15). Choosing between these two nodal points lies a translator's fundamental role in communicating between the source language text and the target language text. However, it can be argued that Whittington's strategy of balancing a formal equivalence with the original text is evident in her choice of transliteration of expressions, even structures, in certain portions of the text. It leans towards the act of reproducing of the semantic appeal of the original text, which often disrupts the delicate art of transcreation and results in a rather static narrative. Thus, Whittington's translation, to a certain extent, contradicts Eugene Nida's Dynamic Equivalence theory, which emphasizes the equivalence of meaning instead of the equivalence of structural and stylistic features of the source language text. Nida's theory can be considered more in tune with the domestication of a text, focusing more on the responses of the readers or the receptors. Whittington takes up a modern Bangla text and translates it in the twenty-first century, fifty years after the publication of the original text, yet chooses to counter the latest stance of translation. Here, it is important to consider Nida's concept of 'Functional Equivalence', which prioritizes the function of the source text and the need for its transcreation over literal wording. The idea of 'Functional Equivalence' was also highlighted by Hans Josef Vermeer in his 'Skopos theory', which asserts the importance of maintaining the functional relationship between the source and the target language text. It is crucial to note that Das himself exercised this approach to translation earlier. When we read Das's translation of his own poems, it becomes clear that translation is not mere transference of meaning but that of the poetic sensibility as well (Munim and Islam, 2014, p. 67).

Whittington's Jibanananda – Translating a void

Malloban is a story set in a void with a never-ending loop of dream-reality sequences. In the novel, the line between dream and reality is blurred. *Malloban* has neither a beginning nor an end. It is a conglomeration of numerous macro and micro contexts (Sengupta, 1995, translated by the author). The protagonist lives in North Calcutta's College Street along with his wife Utpala and daughter Monu. The novel does not have a conventional plot and primarily revolves around

Malloban's daily experiences of discontent. The protagonist realizes at the very beginning of the novel that it is his 43rd birthday: "So forty-two years of his life have gone by" (Das, 1973/2022, p. 3). The novel begins with Malloban waking up alone with a sense of loss. A hollow sigh that marks the novel's inception spreads through the gradual, painful isolation of the protagonist from his family and surroundings, culminating in his isolation from himself. The circular narrative, with the protagonist's interspersed monologues, convoluted and dramatic at times, is marked by a sense of alienation leading towards his nauseous, insomniac and disturbing realization of the futility of human existence. Between the acts of waking up and going to sleep (also signifying birth and death, respectively) lies the fragmented story of Malloban. With its unconventional employment of stream of consciousness, deliberate use of scatology, unconcealed depiction of an arduous marital life and an eccentric psychosexual tension, Das's *Malloban* wavers back and forth between the gambits of modernism and postmodernism in literature. It is an absurd understatement to say that translating such a peculiar piece of literature, both at the time of its production and at present, is an immensely challenging task. The worlds of Jibanananda Das, Malloban and Rebecca Whittington are different. As a translator, she sometimes seems unable to enter Das and Malloban's shared world. In her translation, Whittington keeps the Bangla colloquial phrases as they are, without footnotes, chooses not to change the punctuation of the source text, and even keeps the syntactic structure unchanged in some places. Her faithfulness towards representing the phrases used by Das and her ardent attempt at retaining accuracy sometimes make her translation read like factual documentation. However, there is no doubt that in certain places her translation of the original heightens the appeal of the novel. While transliterating some culture-specific and language-specific expressions, she keeps some of them aurally, even visually, aligned with the original ones. These frequent shifts in translation strategies pave the way for numerous discussions on the choice of a translator, both as a creative writer and a philologist to a certain extent.

Whittington's translation of *Malloban* "tends strongly towards the literal in terms of vocabulary and syntax" (Das, 1973/2022, p. xxii). Here one is reminded of Walter Benjamin's advice of decomposing a text into the building blocks- the words and the phrases, the grammatical nuances and relations, while translating it into a foreign language, putting more emphasis on retaining those relations and syntax rather than prioritizing the 'authenticity' of the source text. Hence, according to Benjamin and Whittington, the words and their syntax, not sentences, should be considered in order to establish the transparency of a translation. There should be an organic and dynamic balance between the meaning that the source text communicates and the syntax of the words and phrases and their grammatical relations because "if the sentence is the wall before the language of the original, literalness is the arcade" (Benjamin, 1996, p. 260). The translator's two particular acts that can immediately capture the attention of the reader and suggest an interesting entry point to the work are her choice of a phonetically equivalent title and the enumeration of chapters. *Malloban* holds a unique distinction among Jibanananda Das's manuscripts, as it is one of the rare few to be titled by Das himself. If transliterated, *Malyaban* would be a more appropriate title where *Malya'* means 'garland' and *ban* signifies a man who is wearing it. Whittington mentions in her note to the translation that a conventional rendition of the name of the book, as well as the eponymous protagonist, would be '*Malyaban*', yet chooses to represent it otherwise even if that puts the readers' recognition of the symbolic meaning of the original at risk (Das, 1973/2022, p.

xvii). In English, the closest connotation of the word Mallo (which might be pronounced as *Mollo*) can be an athlete or acrobat. This can cause confusion since a man wearing a garland (*Malyaban*) and an acrobat (*Malloban*) are vastly different. Thus, this conscious and intrepid choice of the translator oscillates between the phonetic appropriation of the title of the translation and the potential confusions or misinterpretations that the phonetically approximated word '*Malloban*' may entail.

In the original novel written in Bangla, there is no chapter division but small spaces that separate one portion of the narrative from another. With every space, the focus of the narrative changes. Whittington initiates chapter divisions in the novel. Putting the narratives in a framework gives it a certain coherence that the original text does not have. The subdivisions of the narratives have been kept intact except for some places where Whittington changes paragraphs, even though it is a continuation of the previous section in the original. Paragraphs or divisions between two subsequent passages of a narrative, like punctuation marks, are an integral part of understanding Jibanananda Das's novels. In the manuscript of Das's *Malloban*, there is no blank space anywhere; it is as if the whole narrative has been written in a certain fit of pique or has been composed to document a dream, much like Coleridge's "Kubla Khan." Das had a habit of putting a line as a marker at the end of his writing, but his manuscript of *Malloban* is one without such lines. Hence, Whittington's chapterization adds a new dimension altogether to the understanding of the novel, giving significant halts to Jibanananda's brisk stream of writing.

Domestication, Foreignization, and the Retention of the *Jibananandiya*

Translating a non-English text into English comes with a bit of consternation as there is no particular linguistic and cultural readership to be targeted; it is uncertain and unknown. A translator, as Spivak points out in her translation of Mahasweta Devi, is also a commentator and, therefore, should have a comprehensive understanding of the different encounters (Devi, 1995, p. xxiii). The act becomes all the more challenging when Rebecca Whittington translates Jibanananda Das, the latter being a producer of vehement colloquialism in his novel and the former being a native American. Das's novel does not only have obscure paroles, culturally and colloquially inflicted expressions and perplexed murmurs of the idiosyncratic protagonist but also has a combination of abrupt shifts between the rural and urban dialects, the poetic and the prosaic, embellished and disfigured language. To convey this side of the *Jibananandiya*, Whittington undertakes a strategy that is neither "domesticated" nor "foreignized" but "intuitive and fluid", yet it is somewhat stagnant in the way it transliterates the Bangla words (Das, 1973/2022, p. xxi). For example, in the very first chapter, there is a poetic description of the strains of Baul songs piercing the *aant* of young Malloban (Das, 1985, p. 5). The Bangla word *aant* originated from the word *aantra* or 'intestines' but is used mostly to mean either the core of one's heart or self-esteem. Whittington transliterates it as the melodies of the baul songs giving "his youthful guts a wrench" (Das, 1973/2022, p. 5). Between *aant* and 'guts' lies a cultural and linguistic gap. This very gap can be seen in the translation of *dandaguli* as "a game of bat and ball" whereas 'tip-cat' would be a more appropriate transliteration, especially when Whittington's translation seemingly abides by the formal equivalence theory of translation and leans towards foreignization of language (Das, 1973/2022, p. 5). This discrepancy between the transliterated words and the cultural connotations

of the original ones can be located in the translation of Bangla words such as *labejaan* (Das, 1985 , p. 7), *supurir gandho* (p. 8), *ramkapas er aanti* (p. 10), *dabna* (p. 12), *bolir kumro* (p. 12), *dyakra minsey* (p. 13), *somottho maagi* (p. 15), *nyatajobra* (p. 16) and *meyemanush* (p. 20) as "moribund" (Das, 1973/2022, p. 8), "betel" (p. 9), seeds of cotton (p. 12), "butt" (p. 15), "sacrificial pumpkin"(p. 15), "rascal"(p. 16), "full-grown woman"(p. 18), "wet mop"(p. 19), and "woman" (p. 24), respectively. The quintessential violence, loath, rebuke and psychosexual tension embedded in the words *bolir kumro* (p. 12) or *dyakra minsey* (p. 13), the sexist aspect of the word *meyemanush* (p. 20), the hatred, obscenity and envy of Utpala inherent in the expression *somottho maagi* (p. 15) cannot find equivalent outlets in their English counterparts that reduce the specific and multifold undertones to a general definition. In such cases footnotes would be helpful to convey Jibanananda's heavily embedded dialectical expressions to a non-native readership. The omission of footnotes might unveil the translator's intention to reach an active readership as she claims to choose "to trust the reader to put some effort into figuring out the delicate web of relations that a collocation holds together" (Das, 1973/2022, p. xxiii). But again, by that logic, her extensive clarification of some words without even italicization of the Bangla words, such as *bene-bou pakhi* (Das, 1985 , p. 18) transliterated as "*bene bou* or 'merchant's wife' bird" (Das, 1973/2022, p. 22) and *Majantali Sarkar* (Das, 1985 , p. 10) as "the folktale cat Majantali Sarkar"(Das, 1973/2022, p. 23) contests the strategy of omitting the footnotes and might create massive confusion in a non-native readership. This sort of tautological digression can again be located in expressions such as "*Nora, bhenge debo danter gora* (Pestle, I'll break the roots of your teeth)" (Das, 1973/2022, p. 95), "*Kota shono, kota!* Listen to you!" (p. 117). These explanations provided within the narrative could have been included in an explanatory note at the end of the book. In that way they would not disrupt the flow of the novel and make the readers conscious of the fact that they are reading a translation. However laudable the seemingly unimpaired colloquial expressions might seem to non-native readers for their exoticism, the non-inclusion of footnotes undermines the overall art of Whittington's translation. That being said, it might be the spectral violence, the oddness of the *Jibananandiya* that led the translator choose the disruptive acts of explanation, thus speaking for as well as countering the "violence channeled through this novel's idiomatic language" (Das, 1973/2022, p. xxii).

It can be argued that Whittington's translation of *Sherwani* as "black coat" is an attempt towards domestication of the term and is more dynamic in its appeal (p. 24). Her combination of different vernacular and English phrases in expressions like "*eh, bapu!*" (p. 18), "*Du dhums!*" (p. 92), "you *shamkol* baby" (p. 93) "the letter *ka*" (p. 95), her unaffected rendition of intricate paroles such as "*Kamikhye*" (p. 31) and "*shamkol*" (p. 93) help retain the linguistic and cultural temper of the original to a certain extent. The problem of finding a correct way to deal with the cultural aspects of the source language text and to convey them accurately in the target language is a recurrent issue that a translator faces. These problems, according to Nida (2000), differ depending on the cultural-linguistic gap between the different languages concerned (p. 130). Language and culture are interrelated and, therefore, essential to the whole enterprise of translation and its implications. Herein, the authenticity and credibility of Whittington's art can be challenged because, contrary to what she claims, *Malloban* is indeed "a period piece in terms of its language", for that matter, any record of experience is a period piece, set in a specific socio-cultural, political, linguistic milieu, shaping the ones writing in that space (Das, 1973/2022, p. xxi). According to Nida (2000),

"differences between cultures may cause more severe complications for the translator than do differences in language structure" (p. 130). A formally equivalent text, as Nida (2000) states, is generated in such a way that the target reader can "understand as much as he can of the customs, manner of thought, and means of expression" of the source language text (p. 129). Whittington chooses to keep the cultural, social and political expressions intact in the translation. But again, the weight of the references languishes because of the lack of explanations and footnotes, thus paradoxically creating the possibility of the historical significance of Das's creation remaining unrecognized by non-native readers. As a result, there is a loss of many culture-specific discourses as well as political references, yet no new discourse is created from those voids. For example, the musical references in Malloban, such as *sharaj wrishabh gandhar* (Das, 1985, p. 4) signifying the three first musical notes which in Bangla are simply called *Sa Re Ga* and in English called "Do Re Mi", are transliterated as "*sharajrishabhgandhar*" (Das, 1973/2022, p. 4). In the references to Indian classical music or the *ragas*, Whittington seems to be unable to render their symbolic and epistemological presence. The culture-specific experiences of space in Das's Malloban cannot hold their formal and factual originality in the translation even in the process of rigorous faithfulness. The significant cultural gaps between the words *Jal chowki* (Das, 1985, p. 20) and "wooden stool" (Das, 1973/2022, p. 25), *Chaubaccha* (Das, 1985, p. 21) and "water tank" (Das, 1973/2022, p. 26), to name a few, stand for an eternally deferred communication between the original text and the translated one. The historical reference to the characters of Brihannala and Uttara from *The Mahabharata* has a right to explanation (Das, 1973/2022, p. 152). The symbolical presence of *Moshari* or the Mosquito Net is culturally distant from the non-native readers, and so is the ritual of eating a *paan* after a meal. The presence of the *messbaris* speaks for an iconic time and lifestyle in Kolkata. The *messbaris* are boarding houses that developed all over the North and Central parts of Calcutta in the mid and late nineteenth century (Sikdar, 2018). Das lived in one such *messbari* in the erstwhile Harrison Road in North Calcutta. His first-hand experiences as a mess boarder find their earnest outlets in many of his stories and novels including *Malloban*. These boarding houses bear a geographical, historical and political significance. Active allusions to colonial India, the Swadeshi, and the struggles for Independence speak for the historical significance of the text and a brief section of explanation of these events would help retain the gravity of the masterpiece in translation. Though this explanation, if addressed within the story, as we previously argued, would serve as an interruption. From that perspective, Whittington's choice here calls for an active participation of a historically, socially, politically, temporally and geographically conscious reader.

Conclusion

Jibanananda's *Malloban* is a celebration of chaos. It evades any coherent framework of translation. Whittington's rendition of the novel seems to impose an overtly disciplined and affable veil on the raw, fragmented and colloquial atmosphere of the original. While a non-native translator often delves into the act of translation with a certain sense of inadequacy and an unavoidable thrust of anxiety about meeting the standards that the source text has set in the sociopolitical, linguistic, cultural and literary backdrop, Whittington's effort to make Jibanananda Das accessible to a global readership is highly commendable. Her world is separated from Jibanananda, or Malloban himself for that matter, by an unfathomable chasm, but she manages to ride the rough sea of translation

nonetheless. This paper has tried to study how Whittington challenges the grand narrative of power dynamics in language and translation by choosing a Bangla novel written by a Bengali writer primarily known as a poet and translating it in English for the first time. By examining the specific case of *Malloban*, this paper has sought to illustrate how collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches can enrich the theory and practice of translation. Using the theory of semantic equivalence in translation as the primary framework, this paper has tried to evaluate the venture of a non-Bengali translator in preserving the narrative, visceral, aural, symbolic and visual essence of a Bangla text. It has attempted to position Whittington not only as a translator but also as a receptor within the wider context of transcultural and bilingual readership. It aims to open novel avenues for further exploration of the complexities and nuances involved in translating culturally rich texts like Das's *Malloban*. By a close and contrastive reading of Das's novel and Whittington's translation, this study has tried to portray a translator not as someone who merely conveys the literal meaning of the words of the source text but as the one who transfers the sensibility embedded in those words. While underscoring the importance of comparative analyses of multiple versions of a text to understand the diverse interpretive choices and their social, political, psychological, cultural and linguistic implications, this paper has shed light on the reception of Whittington's translation among English-speaking audiences, providing insights into cross-cultural understandings and potential misinterpretations. Through its detailed analysis and exploration of translation strategies, this study has sought to advocate for a more dynamic and inclusive approach to translation, recognizing it as both an art form and a critical academic discipline. The manuscript of *Malloban* was discovered nearly two decades after it was written and after almost three decades of its initial publication, it has been translated into English, thanks to Rebecca Whittington. However culturally distant or linguistically disruptive it might be at some points, it stands as the first and only English translation of the novel to date. Addressing the research gap in Jibanananda studies, particularly in his prose writings, this paper strives to situate the act of translation as an antidote to that vacuum. It tries to assess how Whittington captures Das's rhythmic intricacies, uncanny pauses, and colloquial expressions, achieving a notable degree of success. Her translation of *Malloban* upturns the binary between domestication and foreignization, dynamic and formal equivalence. She chooses to render it in a way that asserts her interpretive authority (Das, 1973/2022, p. xxiii). With all its shades and subtleties, Whittington's *Malloban* is an ardent attempt to create a linguistically and culturally limitless Jibanananda, to make the solitary artist a universal figure in world literature, not only in poetry but also in fiction. It makes a case that blurs all kinds of divisions and creates a fluid space, a mystifying chronotope, fierce yet quiet, stupefying and retentive; a space where the concept of originality takes a back seat and the retention of the authenticity of a particular text is redundant; a space where Jibanananda Das and Rebecca Whittington sit face to face-to-face and engage in a conversation.

Note

¹In this paper, apart from titles of the books, the non-English (primarily Bangla) phrases and expressions are written in italics for the sake of emphasis.

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