Translation Reconsidered

Translation Reconsidered: Culture, Genre and the “Colonial Encounter” in Nineteenth Century Bengal

By

Chandrani Chatterjee

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For:

Baba, Maa and Tina

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—Chandrani Chatterjee
Pune, India

CHAPTER ONE

THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TRANSLATION: TRANSLATION, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

CHANDRANI CHATTERJEE

1.1 Definition of Translation

One of the definitions of the word “translate” is “to transfer from one place or condition to another”. We also need to note that the words “translate” and “transfer” have the same etymological roots (trans + *ferre*/ *latum: latum* is the past participle of the verb *ferre* which means “to carry” or “to bear”).[1] The process of translation thus presupposes a movement, a dislocation and thereby a relocation in a different place.[2] This brings into question two important poles in any process of translation – the source and the target languages/cultures. The dislocation happens in the source language/culture and its relocation in the target language/culture. In trying to bridge the discrepancies in any process of translation traditional scholars and critics have engaged themselves in debating the moral aspect of translation. A traditional theory of translation understands it as a binary phenomenon: there are always two elements of a translating process, an original text in one language and its secondary production in some other language. It is therefore its relation to the original, which decisively determines every translation. Opinion has differed down the ages as to whether the writing of poetry, or any kind of “original” text, involves exercising or imparting some species of moral virtue. But the translation of existing texts has commonly been viewed in ethically loaded terms: whatever the moral standing of the original, the translator is expected to adhere to it in a spirit whose definition is essentially moral. The classic expression of this syndrome is in the recurrent appeals to “fidelity”. Fidelity, can be of many kinds; but the implication here is undoubtedly of sexual faith. This point has been made by a number of women translators and scholars, like Susan Basnett.[3] The sense surfaces in the weary old sexist quip that a “translation” is like a woman, either beautiful or faithful but not both. As with a woman’s change of partner, the departure of a translation from the original evokes the compelling suggestion of a threatening, subversive force, the infringement of set parameters of possession and authority. Translation can destabilize the protocol of signification whereby the author of an “original” text claims precedence by a precarious and questionable process. This equivalence model, however, is now waning to give way to more descriptive and culture oriented approaches to translation. Susan Bassnett-McGuire in their seminal book *Translation Studies*, have identified the “problems of equivalence” involved in any process of translation and concluded thus:

> Equivalence in translation, then, should not be approached as a search for sameness, since sameness cannot even exist between two TL versions of the same text, let alone between the SL and the TL version.[4]

Recalling the age-old debate between translation as a “creative” or “secondary activity”, Bassnett pointed out how views about translation have changed down the ages signalling what may be called a “cultural turn” in Translation Studies:

> Translation Studies, then, has moved beyond the old distinctions that sought to devalue the study and practice of translation by the use of such terminological distinctions as “scientific vs. creative”. Theory and practice are indissolubly linked, and are not in conflict. Understanding of the processes can only help in the production and since the product is the result of a complex system of decoding and encoding on the semantic, syntactic and pragmatic levels, it should not be evaluated according to an outdated hierarchical interpretation of what constitutes “creativity”.
>
> The case for Translation Studies and for translation itself is summed up by Octavio Paz in his short work on translation. All texts, he claims, being part of a literary system descended from and related to other systems, are “translations of translations of translations”:
>
> Every text is unique and, at the same time, it is the translation of another text. No text is entirely original because language itself, in its essence, is already a translation: firstly, of the non-verbal world and secondly, since every sign and every phrase is the translation of another sign and another phrase. However, this argument can be turned around without losing any of its validity: all texts are original because every translation is distinctive. Every translation, up to a certain point, is an invention and as such it constitutes a unique text.[5]

1.2 Translation in Practice

No introduction to Translation Studies can claim to be complete without a consideration of the discipline in its historical perspective. Though theorising on translation is a comparatively new domain the practice of translation is not a new field. In the chapter titled "History of Translation Theory", Bassnett-McGuire gave a comprehensive picture of the history of translation and the emergence of Translation Studies as a discipline.[6] Charting literary history since the Romans to the twentieth century gives a clear idea of how different concepts of translation prevailed at different times, and how the function and the role of the translator has radically altered over the ages. One of the reasons for such shifts can be attributed to the province of cultural history. Thus while Roman translation can, "[. . .] be perceived as unique in that it arises from a vision of literary production that follows an established canon of excellence across linguistic boundaries. . ."[7], in the twentieth century James McFarlane's article "Modes of Translation" (1953) raised the level of the discussion of translation in English, and has been described as "the first publication in the West to deal with translation and translations from a modern, interdisciplinary view."[8]

Susan Bassnett- McGuire also notes how the significance of translation in Roman literature has often been used to accuse the Romans of being unable to create imaginative literature in their own right. Stress was always laid on the creative imagination of the Greeks as opposed to the more practical Roman mind. The Romans perceived themselves as a continuation of their Greek models and Roman literary critics discussed Greek texts without seeing the language of those texts as being in any way an inhibiting factor. The Roman literary system sets up a hierarchy of texts and authors that overrides linguistic boundaries. Cicero points out that the mind dominates the body as a king rules over his subjects or a father controls his children, but warns that where a Roman dominates as a master ruling his slaves, "it keeps them down and crushes them."[9] With translation, the ideal SL text is there to be imitated and not to be crushed by the too rigid application of Reason. Cicero makes this distinction explicit when he comments, "If I render word for word, the result will sound uncouth, and if compelled by necessity I alter anything in the order of wording, I shall seem to have departed from the function of a translator."[10] Both Horace and Cicero, in their remarks on translation, make an important distinction between word for word translation and sense for sense translation. The underlying principle of enriching the native language and literature through translation led to a stress on the aesthetic criteria of the TL product rather than on more rigid notions of "fidelity". Horace in his *Art of Poetry*, warned against overcautious imitation of the source model:

> A theme that is familiar can be made your own property so long as you do not waste your time on a hackneyed treatment; nor should you try to render your original word for word like a slavish translator, or in imitating another writer plunge yourself into difficulties from which shame, or the rules you have laid down for yourself, prevent you from extricating yourself.[11]

It is interesting to note how as early as Horace there is a hint in translation of what in the twentieth century would be termed a process of "trans-creation".

With the spread of Christianity, translation came to acquire another role, that of disseminating the word of God. Because, Christianity presented the translator with a mission, that encompassed both aesthetic and evangelistic criteria. Bible translation remained a key issue well into the seventeenth century, and the problems intensified with the growth of concepts of national cultures and with the coming of the Reformation. I will not dwell on the intricacies of Bible translation here, because the enormity of the subject matter involved in such discussion cannot be dealt with here. It suffices to say that, translation came to be used as a weapon in both dogmatic and political conflicts as nation states began to emerge and the centralization of the Church started to weaken, which in linguistic terms implied a decline of Latin as the universal language.[13]

Apart from Bible translations, the Renaissance afforded under its humanistic programmes the translation of several Greek and Latin texts into English.[14] Translation, far from being a secondary activity, became a primary one, exerting a shaping force on the intellectual life of the age, and at times the figure of the translator appeared as a revolutionary rather than a mere imitator of the original. In fact, Wyatt and Surrey's translation of Petrarch's sonnets were described by critics as adaptations and not as translations, for it did not show faithfulness to individual words or sentence structures but to a notion of the meaning of the poem in its relationship to its readers. In other words, the poem was considered as being an artefact of a particular cultural system, and thus, the only faithful translation could be to give it a similar function in the target cultural system. Translation in Renaissance Europe came to play a role of central importance. According to George Steiner:

> At a time of explosive innovation, and amid a real threat of surfeit and disorder, translation absorbed, shaped, oriented the necessary raw material.

> It was, in a full sense of the term, the *matiere premiere* of the imagination. Moreover, it established a logic of relation between past and present, and between different tongues and traditions which were splitting apart under stress of nationalism and religious conflict.[15]

By the mid-seventeenth century the effects of the Counter-Reformation, the conflict between absolute monarchy and the developing Parliamentary system, and the widening of the gap between traditional Christian Humanism and science had all led to radical changes in the theory of literature and hence to the role of translation. In their attempt to find models, writers turned to ancient masters, seeing in imitation a means of instruction. Translation of the classics increased considerably in France between 1625 and 1660, the great age of French classicism and of the flowering of French theatre based on the Aristotelian unities. French writers and theorists were in turn enthusiastically translated into English.

One can get a fair idea of the Augustan theory of translation in Sir John Denham's (1615-69) poem "To Sir Richard Fanshawe upon his Translation of Pastor Fido"[16] (1648) and in his Preface to his translation of *The Destruction of Troy* (1656) which covers both the formal aspect (Art) and the spirit (Nature) of the work, but warns against applying the principle of literal translation to the translation of poetry:

> [...] for it is not his business alone to translate Language into Language, but Poesie into Poesie; and Poesie is of so subtile a spirit, that in pouring out of one Language into another, it will all evaporate; and if a new spirit be not added in the transfusion, there will remain nothing. [17]

In Denham's one can see equal importance being accorded to the translator and the original writer, however, they are seen as clearly operating in different social and temporal contexts. Denham sees it as the translator's duty to his source text to extract what he perceives as the essential core of the work and to reproduce or recreate the work in the target language.

The other writer in the seventeenth century who contributed to the understanding of translation was Abraham Cowley (1618-1667). In the "Preface" to his Pindarique Odes (1656) he boldly asserted that he has "taken, left out and added what I please" in his translations, aiming not so much at indicating what the original author said than what was his way and manner of speaking. Cowley's procedure was opposed to and could be taken as a more libertine approach to translation than Dryden's who would prefer the term "imitation" for translation. John Dryden (1631-1700), in his important *Preface* to Ovid's *Epistles* (1680), used three ways to handle the problem of translation. He used the terms "metaphrase", or turning an author word by word, and line by line, from one language into another; "paraphrase" or the Ciceronian "sense-for-sense" view of translation; "imitation", where the translator can abandon the text of the original as he sees fit. Of these three types Dryden advocated the second as the more balanced path. Dryden's views on translation were followed fairly closely by Alexander Pope (1688-1744), who advocated a middle ground as Dryden.

In the eighteenth century, the concept of translator as painter or imitator with a moral duty both to his original subject and to his receiver started gaining ground. However, this view also underwent a series of significant changes as the search to codify and describe the processes of literary creation altered. In this regard Goethe (1749-1832) made his significant contribution arguing for both a new concept of "originality" in translation, together with a vision of universal deep structures that the translator should strive to meet. According to Susan Bassnett, Goethe's view was "dangerously close to a theory of untranslatability."[18]

It was to the end of the eighteenth century, in 1791, that Alexander Fraser Tytler published a volume entitled *The Principles of Translation*, the first systematic study in English of the translation processes. Tytler set up three basic principles:

> The translation should give a complete transcript of the idea of the original work.
>
> The style and manner of writing should be of the same character with that of the original.
>
> The translation should have all the case of the original composition.
>
> Tytler reacts against Dryden's influence, maintaining that the concept of "paraphrase" had led to exaggeratedly loose translations, although he agrees that part of the translator's duty is to clarify obscurities in the original, even where this entails omission or addition.[19]

However, it was in the Romantic era that with a great deal of emphasis being laid on the role of imagination as a faculty in the creative process, a lot of varied approaches to translation became available. Coleridge (1772-1834) in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817) outlined his theory of the distinction between Fancy and Imagination, asserting that Imagination is the supreme creative and organic power, as opposed to the lifeless mechanism of Fancy. This theory of Coleridge, has affinities with the theory of opposition of the mechanical and organic form outlined by the German theorist and translator August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767-1845).

Both the English and the German theories raise the question of how to define translation – as a creative or mechanical enterprise. The pre-eminence of Imagination as opposed to Fancy leads implicitly to the assumption that translation must be inspired by the higher creative force if it is to become more than an activity of the everyday world with the loss of the original shaping spirit. In his study of Shelley and translation Timothy Webb shows how the ambiguousness of the role of the translator is reflected in the poet's own writings. Quoting from Shelley's works and from Medwin, his biographer, Webb demonstrates that Shelley saw translation as an activity with a lower status, as a "way of filling in the gaps between inspirations", and points out that Shelley appears to shift from translating works admired for their ideas to translating works admired for their literary graces.[20] According to Susan Bassnett:

> This shift is significant, for in a sense it follows Goethe's hierarchy of translating and it shows the problem that translation posed in the establishment of a Romantic aesthetic. Most important of all, with the shift of emphasis away from the formal processes of translation, the notion of untranslatability would lead on to the exaggerated emphasis on technical accuracy and resulting pedantry of later nineteenth-century translating.[21]

The Victorian writers and critics showed a concern with the remoteness of the original. Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), praised the profusion of the German translations claiming that the Germans studied other nations "in spirit which deserves to be oftener imitated" in order to participate in "whatever worth or beauty" another nation had produced.[22] Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882) noted in his Preface to the translations from Early Italian Poets (1861) that, "The only true motive for putting poetry into a fresh language must be to endow a fresh nation, as far as possible, with one more possession of beauty",[23] noting also that the originals were often obscure and imperfect. Matthew Arnold (1822-68) in his first lecture "On Translating Homer" advises the lay reader to put his trust in scholars, for they alone can say whether the translation produces more or less the same effect as the original and gives the following advice to the would-be translator:

> Let not the translator, then, trust to his notions of that the ancient Greeks would have thought of him; he will lose himself in the vague. Let him not trust to what the ordinary English reader thinks of him; he will be taking the blind for his guide. Let him not trust his own judgement of his own work; he may be misled by individual caprices. Let him ask how his work affects those who both know Greek and can appreciate poetry.[24]

What emerges from a general survey of the currents of translation in the age of the Victorians was that translation was largely viewed as a scholar's activity, where the pre-eminence of the SL text is assumed over any TL version. Translation was also one of the means of encouraging the intelligent reader to return to the SL original. Translation was a means by which the translator offered his own pragmatic choice to the TL reader.

The Victorian ideal of translation can be best seen in Edward Fitzgerald (1809-63), who is best known for his version of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (1858). He declared that a text must live at all costs "with a transfusion of one's own worst Life if one can retain the Original better." It was Fitzgerald who made the famous remark that it was better to have a live sparrow than a stuffed eagle. In other words, far from attempting to lead the TL reader to the SL original, Fitzgerald's work seeks to bring a version of the SL text into the TL culture as a living entity.[24]

Much of the discussion in English on translation in theory and practice in the first half of the twentieth century notes the continuation of many of the Victorian concepts of translation. However, it then returns continually to the problem of evaluation without any clear theoretical base from which to begin such an investigation. It has been generally acknowledged that the nature of translation varies from scientific and legal documents to that of literature. How then does one go about evaluating literary translations?

1.3 Some Theoretical Approaches to Translation

In the previous section, I tried to provide an overview of translation in practice. I am aware that the section has been rather selective. However, the idea was to have in mind some basic tenets of translation in practice before moving to certain twentieth century theorizing on translation. The very idea of trying to keep the practice and the theory of translation apart may sound illogical or even dangerous. Nevertheless, this approach I feel would enable the reader to chart the different landmarks in the shifts in approach in translation and also see the emergence of Translation Studies as an independent area if not discipline of theoretical concern and research. In the present section I would highlight some twentieth century developments in the theory of translation.

The study of translation has been influenced by the changes and transformations that have been taking place in the field of literary theories in the twentieth century. Therefore, it is worthwhile to discuss the development of translation theory as a parallel to the development of modern literary theory. Modern translation theory like modern literary theory begins with formalism and structuralism and reflects the proliferation of theories in the age.

1.3.1 Ferdinand De Saussure

Ferdinand de Saussure’s (1857-1913) monumental work *Course in General Linguistics* has influenced the way in which we perceive language. In the 1950’s and 60’s, Saussure’s work wielded a profound impact on disciplines like anthropology, Marxist criticism, psychoanalysis, cultural analysis etc. The reverberations of Saussurean influence were also felt on translation as new approaches like formalist and structuralist perspectives started emerging. Saussure was concerned with an objective approach to study linguistic units of every language that make human communication possible. For Saussure, a study of language meant a study of the system of signs and not the individual speech units. As a translator is concerned with two language systems, a study of the objective linguistic features of both the languages would help in striking a linguistic balance in translation. Translation provides the readiest confirmation of the basic principles of Saussurean semantics. “Whether we try,” says Saussure, “ to find the meaning of the Latin word *arbor* or the word that Latin uses to designate the concept “tree” it is clear that only the association sanctioned by that language appear to us to conform to reality, and we disregard whatever others might be imagined.”[25]

Translation then becomes the philosophically redoubtable project of transferring a “reality” from its native verbal habitat to another, or to put it in other words, of extending a “reality”, beyond its proper verbal confines, formulating it in terms other than the original ones in which it was experienced and defined. “One is led towards the image of an organ transplant whose viability is constantly in question,” says Sukanta Chaudhuri in *Translation and Understanding*.[26]

Saussurian linguistics is based upon form/content distinctions, on the signifier/signified distinctions that ground traditional metaphysical philosophy, and still trouble Translation Studies. This dichotomized thinking and the hierarchies generated by such distinctions are the same that deconstruction finds limiting and against which it operates.

1.3.2 Walter Benjamin

Another early proponent of translation was Walter Benjamin (1892-1940). His 1923 essay, “The Task of the Translator”, for the first time showed how a translation participated in the “after life” of the foreign text, enacting an interpretation that is informed by a history of reception. According to Benjamin:

> Translation is so far removed from being the sterile equation of two dead languages that of all literary forms it is the one charged with the social mission of watching over the maturing process of the original language and the birth pangs of its own.[27]

Benjamin's essay raises some important questions about the theory and practice of translation. By calling translation an "after life" Benjamin is in a way trying to do away with the earlier strict notions of equivalence in translation. If the process itself is of transformation, then the debates about fidelity and equivalence does not arise. Moreover, Benjamin's theory focuses on interpretation that is informed by a history of reception. Translation no longer remains a mere transmission of messages, but it recreates the values that have been added to the foreign text over time. In his text Benjamin actually got rid of the idea of the original and therefore of the binaries that loomed large on traditional translation theory. A translation for Benjamin did not refer to an original text, it had nothing to do with communication, its purpose was not to carry meaning, etc. He illustrates the relation between the so-called original and translation by using the metaphor of a tangent: translation is like a tangent, which touches the circle, that is, the original in one single point only to follow thereafter its own way. Neither the original nor the translation, neither the language of the original nor the language of the translation are fixed and persisting categories. They do not have essential quality and are being constantly transformed in space and time. This is the reason why Benjamin's essay became so important for the deconstructionist theory for it so vehemently questioned the idea of an essential origin.

1.3.3 Roman Jakobson

Russian Formalism, which was influenced by Saussurean linguistics provided a new theoretical perspective to analyse the system of signs in a text by emphasising their individual and independent status. In the essay, "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation", Roman Jakobson (1896-1982), distinguishes between three types of translation:

i) Intralingual or rewording (an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs in the same language).

ii) Interlingual translation, or translation proper (an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language).

iii) Intersemiotic translation or transmutation (an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of the non-verbal sign system).[28]

Jakobson’s classification is a landmark in translation theories as it provides a theoretical framework for an understanding of the problems of translation at different planes. As he points out, languages differ not merely, because they are two different semiotic systems, but because they convey different messages. The task of the translator was to find an “equivalence in difference” which would lead him to “an examination of their mutual translatability”. According to Jakobson:

> The intralingual translation of a word uses either another, more or less synonymous, word or resorts to a circumlocution. Yet synonymy, as a rule, is not complete equivalence: for example, “every celibate is a bachelor, but not every bachelor is a celibate.” A word or an idiomatic phrase-word, briefly a code-unit of the highest level, may be fully interpreted only by means of an equivalent combination of code-units, i.e., a message referring to this code unit: “every bachelor is an unmarried man, and every unmarried man is a bachelor,” or “every celibate is bound not to marry, and everyone who is bound not to marry is a celibate. . . Likewise, on the level of interlingual translation, there is ordinarily no full equivalence between code units, while messages may serve as adequate interpretations of alien code-units or messages. . . Most frequently, however, translation from one language into another substitutes messages in one language not for separate code-units but for entire messages in some other language. . . Thus translation involves two equivalent messages in two different codes.[29]

Jakobson’s essay introduces a semiotic reflection on translatability. Jakobson questions empiricist semantics by conceiving of meaning, not as a reference to reality, but as a relation to a potentially endless chain of signs. He describes translation as a process of recoding which involves two equivalent message in two different codes. Jakobson underestimates the interpretive nature of translation, the fact that recoding is an active rewording that does not simply transmit the foreign message, but transforms it. Unlike Benjamin therefore, Jakobson’s approach emphasises the equivalence model of linguistic operation than the interpretive or hermeneutic approach. Nevertheless, he acknowledges the differences among cultural discourses, especially in poetry, where the grammatical categories carry a high semantic import and therefore require translation that is a creative transposition into different system of signs. However, it seems to me that, Jakobson’s approach suffers from certain shortcomings. His overemphasis on the notion of “code”, and his move to identify a translator with a decoder and a recoder of a message seems to be a reductionist and a minimalist enterprise.

1.3.4 Eugene A. Nida

Saussurean emphasis on a study of objective linguistic structures, influenced translation theorists, who in turn, started searching the underlying structures of the source language and the target language. Eugene A. Nida (b. 1914), for example, developed an approach which would posit a "science" of translation, that studies objective features common in a language and validates and transforms them in a different language. In the essay titled "Principles of Translation as Exemplified by Bible Translating," Nida writes:

> [. . .] it is essential that we point out that in Bible translating, as in almost all fields of translating, the most frequent mistakes result from a failure to make adequate syntactic adjustments in the transference of a message from one language to another. Quite satisfactory equivalents for all works and even idioms may have been found, but a person's oversight or inability to rearrange the semantic units in accordance with the different syntactic instruction as being "foreign" and unnatural.[30]

Drawing from his experience of translating the Bible, Nida argues that a perfect communication is not possible during translation. Nevertheless, a closer approximation could be obtained if the translator is sensitive to the latent structures of the languages. However, Nida's approach suffers from certain fundamental limitations. In his attempt to develop a "science" of translation, Nida underestimates the role of interpretation and hermeneutics. As Nida's theory emerges from his practical experiences of translating the Bible, there appears to be a kind of sacredness associated with the "original" work, as translations of most religious texts seem to have. Nida's "science" acquires a prescriptive dimension trying to safeguard the intentions of the "original".

1.3.5 George Steiner

The next major development towards a new theoretical approach to translation, a target- oriented hermeneutic approach, is George Steiner's (b. 1929) 1973 study *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*.[31] It opposes modern linguistics with a literary and philosophical approach. Whereas linguistics-oriented theorists define translation as functional communication, Steiner returns to German Romanticism and the hermeneutic tradition. He views translation as an interpretation of a foreign text that is at once profoundly sympathetic and violent, exploitive and ethically restorative. For Steiner, language is not instrumental in communicating meaning, but constitutive in reconstructing it. It is the individualistic aspects of language, “the privacies of individual usage,” that resist interpretation and escape the universalizing concepts of linguistics. Steiner argues that, “great translation must carry with it the most precise sense possible of the resistant, of the barriers intact at the heart of understanding.” In the chapter titled “The Hermeneutic Motion”, Steiner elaborates on what constitutes the act of translation:

> The hermeneutic motion, the act of elicitation and appropriative transfer of meaning, is fourfold…All understanding, and the demonstrative statement of understanding which is translation, starts with an act of trust…After trust comes aggression. The second move of the translator is incursive and extractive…The third move is incorporative, in the strong sense of the word…The final stage or moment in the process of translation is that which I have called ‘compensation’ or ‘restitution’.[32]

1.3.6 Jacques Derrida

The entire problematic of translation underwent a drastic change with Jacques Derrida’s (1930-2004) notion of deconstruction. Derrida questioned the “presence” of a defined and definite meaning in a text by highlighting the constant alterity and difference between the signifier and the signified. According to Derrida, the history of western metaphysics is a history of setting boundaries that limit language, writing and reading to certain specific categorisation. Deconstruction attempts to show that language is always in the state of “freeplay” with multiple significations. Deconstruction thereby posed certain fundamental questions to the traditional understanding of translation. The notion of the “original” is highly problematic for Derrida who subverts the traditional binary of “original/translation” to bring out the significance of the latter. For Derrida, every thought that is written is a translation, as writing brings out the impossibility of adhering to a fixed identity or meaning. Since translation involves both a differing and a deferring of meaning, Derrida writes that translation best explicates what he terms as *“differance”*. *“Differance”* refers to a “play of traces” that signify an absence of an identifiable meaning in a text. Edwin Gentzler, commenting on the “play of traces” in translation writes as follows:

> In terms of informing translation theory, Derrida's "play of trace" belong not to a translation which carries identifiable meaning across boundaries, but to a movement along an absent road, one that has disseminated or evaporated, of a voice which tells but cannot be captured, an echo disappearing as it is heard.[33]

According to Derrida, any debate that "centers" around the "original" is the product of metaphysics. Deconstruction would erase any fixation of identities, meanings and representations attached to the "original" by displaying the graphic forces that operates in the "freeplay" of "traces".

Derrida challenges the reader to think and rethink every moment a translation solution is posed, an item named, an identity fixed, or a sentence inscribed. With each naming gesture Derrida suggests a footnote, a note in the margin, or a preface also is in order to retrieve those subtle differing supplementary meanings and tangential notions lost in the process of transcription. At the foundation of Derrida's thought is the assumption that there is no kernel or deep structure, nothing that we may ever discern - let alone represent, translate, or found a theory on. Rather Derrida bases his theory of deconstruction on non-identity, or non-presence, or unrepresentability. What does exist, according to Derrida, are different chains of signification - including the "original" and its translation in a symbiotic relationship.

The subject of translation theory has traditionally involved some concept of determinable meaning that can be transferred to another system of signification. Deconstruction questions such a definition of translation and uses the practice of translation to demonstrate the instability of its own theoretical framework. Deconstruction resists systems of categorization which separate "source" text from "target" text or "language" from "meaning". It denies the existence of underlying forms independent of language, and questions theoretical assumptions which presume originary beings, in whatever shape or form. In translation what is visible is language referring not to things but to language itself.

Translation thus, can release an alternative, subversive potential of the text, turn it inside out to bring its deconstructive factor to the fore. The new language draws out possibilities beyond the original writer's intention or awareness, possibilities he might have consciously rejected. Going beyond authorial intention or awareness, they might be possibilities that his own language would not admit but that are instilled in the new text by the structures of the target language.

The source text, a semiotic construct of indeterminate range, is negotiated by seizing on a feasible, tractable part of its range and imposing upon it a similar segment of another indeterminate construct in another language. By a process analogous to Derridean *differance* - indeed a special version of it - translation endlessly extends and thus endlessly defers the implications of the original. Derrida's words in a different context are applicable to the pursuit of equivalence in translation:

> If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infiniteness of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field – that is, language and a finite language – excludes totalization[...] The movement of signification adds something, which results in the fact that there is always more, but this addition is a floating one because it comes to perform a vicarious function, to supplement a lack on the part of the signified."[34]

1.3.7 The Poly-system theory

The theoretical developments discussed so far have shown a European bias and also seem to have come from certain monolingual societies. They do not contribute much to the understanding of our indigenous multi-lingual context of the nineteenth century, which will be the focus of the later chapters of the present study, where the transactions between the Indian languages were being mediated by the classical past as well as the colonial present. Thus, I will discuss here in brief some such theoretical approaches that deal with the politics of translation in the non-European context.

The Poly-system theory would be one such step, moving away from the European bias in translation theory. Though it is commonplace to associate the name of Gideon Toury with poly-system theory, he had his predecessor in Itamar-Even-Zohar. Itamar-Even-Zohar working at the Tel Aviv University, developed the poly-system hypothesis while working on a model for Israeli Hebrew literature. Even-Zohar adopted the Russian Formalist Jurij Tynjanov's concept of a hierarchical literary system and then used the data collected from his observations on how translation functions in various societies to describe the hierarchical cultural system as a whole. Zohar coined the term "poly-system" to refer to the entire network of correlated systems – literary and extra-literary – within society, and develops an approach called Poly-system theory to attempt to explain the unction of all kinds of writing within a given culture – from the central canonical texts to the most marginal non-canonical texts. The substance of Even-Zohar's research involves his exploration of the complex interrelations between the various systems, especially those between the major systems and the minor subsystems.

Gideon Toury, a younger colleague of Zohar adopted the polysystem concept, isolated and defined certain translation “norms” that influence translation decisions and incorporated these factors in the larger framework of a comprehensive theory of translation, published in *In Search of a Theory of Translation*, involved an attempt to develop a more comprehensive theory of translation based on findings from his field study. One of the goals of the field study was to discover the actual decisions made during the translation process, through which he hoped to discover a system of rules governing translation in a particular poly-system. Ironically, according to Toury’s field study, linguistics and aesthetics played a very small role in the translation process; in fact, Toury found that most texts were selected for ideological reasons. He argued further that translations themselves have no fixed identity, because they are always subject to different socio-literary contextual factors. Therefore, translations must be viewed as having multiple identities, dependent upon the forces that govern the decision process at a particular time. Toury viewed “original” texts as containing clusters of properties, meanings and possibilities. All translations privilege certain properties/meanings at the expense of the others. Thus, the concept of a “correct” translation ceases to exist. Toury posited a target oriented theory for translation, rejecting a notion of equivalence.

1.3.8 Lawrence Venuti

Lawrence Venuti is an important theoretician who has focussed mainly on the interdisciplinary nature of translation in the twentieth century. In the “Introduction” to the *The Translation Studies Reader* edited by Venuti, he argues how the “history of translation theory can be imagined as a set of changing relationships between the relative autonomy of the translated text, or the translator’s actions, and two other concepts : equivalence and function.” In fact Venuti’s work typifies key trends in culturally oriented research during the last decade of the twentieth century. His key concerns are regarding the contemporary situation of English language translating which lead to marginality and exploitation on the one hand; while on the other the prevalence of fluent strategies lead to easy readability and thereby produces the illusion of transparency, enabling a translated text to pass for the original and thereby rendering the translator invisible. In his book *The Translator’s Invisibility*, he interrogates the long dominance of fluency and also the various literary and ideological effects and locates alternative translation practices in English and foreign traditions. In his next work, *The Scandals of Translation*, Venuti scrutinizes the various practices and institutions, like original authorship, copyright law, the academy and the publishing industry, that both need and marginalize translation. The concern in almost all of Venuti's writings on translation is with the strategy shifts according to the position of the translating culture in various social hierarchies, be it local, national or global. All these ideas come together in the essay "Translation, Community, Utopia", where Venuti raises the issue of "displacement" as being inherent in any process of translation:

> […] the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text can only be signalled indirectly, by their displacement in the translation, through a domestic difference introduced into values and institutions at home. This ethical attitude is therefore simultaneous with a political agenda: the domestic terms of the inscription become the focus of rewriting in the translation…

It is in the same essay that Venuti talks about "heterogeneous communities" in translation processes. Referring to Benedict Anderson's much theorized notion of "imagined communities", Venuti uses the same in the case of translation and comments thus:

> In the case of a translation, this image is derived from the representation of the foreign text constructed by the translator, a communication domestically inscribed. To translate is to invent for the foreign text new readerships who are aware that their interest in the translation is shared by other readers, foreign and domestic – even when those interests are incommensurable.

The imagined communities, fostered by translation, produce effects that are commercial, as well as cultural and political. Furthering the idea of the heterogeneity of a translation process, Venuti realizes that translation is also utopian:

> Yet translating is also utopian. The domestic inscription is made with the very intention to communicate the foreign text, and so it is filled with the anticipation that a community will be created around that text – although in translation. In the remainder lies the hope that the translation will establish a domestic readership, an imagined community that shares an interest in the foreign, possibly a market from the publishers point of view. And it is only through the remainder, when inscribed with part of the foreign context, that the translation can establish a common understanding between domestic and foreign readers. In supplying an ideological resolution, a translation projects a utopian community that is not yet realized.

1.4 The "Cultural Turn" in Translation Studies

After having looked at some of the twentieth century theoretical approaches to translation, the aim of this section is to understand translation as processes of several cultural transactions in which language is one component. The notion of transaction brings to mind a two-way process or movement, a giving and taking, a borrowing and lending. Moreover, such processes cannot exist in a vacuum and thus the society becomes the site for such exchanges. Exchanges, no matter what their nature and character, have existed since the early days of human civilization (from the barter system to the age of internet and emails). These processes of transactions can largely be looked upon as translations in its different manifestations.

This section proposes to discuss certain aspects of the theory of cultural translation, addressing the need for incorporating culture as part of Translation Studies. There has been an increasing trend of Translation Studies being considered under the larger rubric of Comparative Literature which also makes the cultural and social dimension of any process of translation crucial.[35] It is interesting to mention a recent endeavour in this direction. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *Death of a Discipline* talks of the future of Comparative Literature, laying out the importance of the encounter with Area Studies and Translation Studies, and offering a radically ethical framework for the approach to subaltern writing. Spivak proposes a practice of cultural translation that resists the appropriation by dominant power and engages in the specificity of writing within subaltern sites in the idiomatic and vexed relation to the effacements of cultural erasure and cultural appropriation. To use Spivak's own words:

> In order to reclaim the role of teaching literature as training the imagination – the great inbuilt instrument of othering – we may, if we work as hard as old-fashioned Comp. Lit. is known to be capable of doing, come close to the irreducible work of translation, not from language to language but from body to ethical semiosis, that incessant shuttle that is a "life."[36]

What is interesting for our purpose is to note the metaphoric use of "translation" here. The two recent anthologies brought out by Katha titled *Translating Caste: Studies in Culture and Translation*[37] and *Translating Desire: The Politics of Gender and Culture*[38] bear testimony to the largely metaphoric way in which translation is being used in recent discourses about politics and culture. Tapan Basu announces the agenda of *Translating Caste* in the Introduction as follows:

> But the issue of Translating Caste is not only an issue of communicating certain narratives about caste across languages or, even, across cultures. The narratives about caste which constitute the core of this collection, in themselves are engagements in an enterprise of translation – the translation of caste as a social institution into an assortment of cultural discourses.[39]

Brinda Bose in her Introduction to *Translating Desire*, makes this metaphoric nature of the process of translation more prominent when she says:

> The title – *Translating Desire* – would like to assume the widest implication of the act of translation, that is, not merely to "express in another language," nor even to just "convey [an idea] from one art or style into another" but to "transform", "transport" and "retransmit" the entire trajectory of a particular aspect of socio-political experience into a variety of artistic and cultural forms. [40]

What emerges from the above approach again is that translation ceases to remain a process of linguistic transfer alone and is being used metaphorically to signify and imply domains that have hitherto never been considered as translations. From a cultural point of view, translation is more than a transcription of written documents. Disciplines like Ethnography and Cultural Studies have used translation to describe processes and situations which are different from the generally accepted notion of translation. Ethnographical narratives consider themselves as translated texts of the given social environment under study.[41] Talal Asad in the essay titled "The Concept of Cultural translation"[42] raises some important ideas that question the equivalence theory of translation, trying to replace it with a cultural approach. It is necessary to quote Asad at length to understand the process of cultural translation that he is hinting at:

> All good translation seeks to reproduce the structure of an alien discourse within the translator's own language. How that structure (or "coherence") is reproduced will, of course, depend on the genre concerned ("poetry," "scientific analysis," "narrative," etc.), on the resources of the translator's language, as well as on the interests of the translator and/or his readership. All successful translation is premised on the fact that it is addressed within a specific language, and therefore also to a specific set of practices, a specific form of life. The further that form of life is from the original, the less mechanical is the reproduction . . . But this pushing beyond the limits of one's habitual usages, this breaking down and reshaping of one's own language through the process of translation, is never an easy business, in part because (if I may be allowed a hypostatization) it depends on the willingness of the translator's language to subject itself to this transforming power. I attribute, somewhat fictitiously, volition to the language because I

> want to emphasize that the matter is largely something the translator cannot determine by individual activity (any more than the individual speaker can affect the evolution of his or her language) – that it is governed by institutionally defined power relations between the languages/modes of life concerned. To put it crudely: because the languages of Third World societies – including, of course, the societies that social anthropologists have traditionally studied – are "weaker" in relation to Western languages (and today, especially to English), they are more likely to submit to forcible transformation in the translation process than the other way around. The reason for this is, first, that in their political-economic relations with Third World countries, Western nations have the greater ability to manipulate the latter. And second, Western languages produce and deploy desired knowledge more readily than Third World languages do. (The knowledge that Third World languages deploy more easily is not sought by Western societies in quite the same way, or for the same reason.)[43]

Asad brings in the notion of power in his understanding of the politics of translation. The alienness of the translator's discourse results from the cultural inequalities indicating thereby that it is at the level of cultures that equivalences ultimately need to be sought and not merely at the linguistic level. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak makes a similar point in her essay "The Politics of Translation" when she says that translations need to be defined by their difference from the original, straining at identity. The management of this difference as identity is the varied politics of the situation of translation. Moreover, the fact that the method and the process of translation varies with the genre in question is also important. In the chapters that follow, I will try to examine the mediating role of genre in the process of cultural translation.

In the case of Cultural Studies, at least two major theoreticians, viz. Stuart Hall[44] and Homi Bhabha[45], have used the concept of translation in cultural analyses. They use the concept to underline the constructed nature of cultures. In other words, both Ethnography and Cultural Studies have been able to generate a critique of the claims of "faithful representation", which still haunt Translation theories.

Through the 1990s, alongside the rise of Translation Studies, there was also the rise of Cultural Studies, without however any perceptible overlap or interaction between the two. In *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation*, Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere titled their final chapter "The Translation Turn in Cultural Studies".[46] They noted that these "interdisciplines," had moved beyond their "Eurocentric beginnings" to enter "a new internationalist phase," and they identified a four point common agenda that Translation Studies and Cultural Studies could