Text, Context and Construction of Identity

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Edited by

Rajesh Kumar and Om Prakash

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

RAJESH KUMAR AND OM PRAKASH

> *"Language is intrinsic to the expression of culture. Language is a fundamental aspect of cultural identity. It is the means by which we convey our innermost self from generation to generation. It is through language that we transmit and express our culture and its values. Language—both code and content—is a complicated dance between internal and external interpretations of our identity."* (Gibson 2004: 1)

The centrality of language in organizing communities and groups cannot be overstated: our social order has developed alongside our linguistic allegiances, shared narratives, collective memories, and common social history. Here, language is not simply a social object, but rather one that significantly determines our associations and social functions. We derive meaning through it and construct a multi-layered identity that situates us in a given sociocultural space.

Taking the above into account, this book is an attempt to understand the phenomena of identity in the many contexts of literary texts and their interpretations. A text is a re-creation of life in a narrative form and is deeply rooted in sociocultural space and time. Texts seek to capture our insights and create a context for deriving meaning from them. Texts encode our history, our shared understanding, our collective memory and experience, our struggles and triumphs, and our collective quest to discover who we are and how we are connected. Text and context intertwines: we cannot imagine one without the other. The work on semiotics by Ferdinand de Saussure (1916), a Swiss linguist, explains how signs capture and deliver their meaning within the structure of a given text. M. M. Bakhtin (1975), on the other hand, suggests that one can see a continuous dialogue with other texts when interpreting the meaning of any given text. Julia Kristeva (1980) in her work on synthesizing the semiotic theory of Ferdinand De Saussure and the dialogism of M. M. Bakhtin first coined the term 'intertextuality' and

proposed that the meaning of a text is not transferred from the writer to the reader, but rather multiple codes/texts mediate the process of interpretation. As Davidson puts it:

> *"Language and literacy, in Bakhtin's model, are in continuous motion through the process of dialogization. Dialogization, the ongoing struggle and tension between unifying (centripetal) and disunifying (centrifugal) linguistic forces, permeates every aspect of language, right down to the very word. Utterances are semi-bounded forms of a word or words, where social genre and the individual come together momentarily in a concrete articulation, coalescing as they are concurrently pulled in various directions by the diverse social languages and individual values embedded within them. Speakers and authors interweave their social and individual values and meanings across and through utterances, connecting utterances with utterances and texts with texts creating an intertextual tapestry of language."* (Davidson 1993:11)

'Text' is a loaded term when used for any piece of work that gives us meaning. In our particular context, we are referring to literary texts and the language contained therein to better understand the construction of identity in such texts. Language encodes our inherited knowledge and helps us create meaning out of our everyday experiences. Language is instrumental in constructing meaning and defining associations with our world. As a social phenomenon, it shapes every aspect of our lives and binds us together. It becomes instrumental in asserting the uniqueness and distinct identities of one group against another. Identity includes many elements apart from language, such as class, region, ethnicity, nation, religion, caste, gender, and education. These associations can be both singular and multiple. It is an intertwined system with elements that complement each other. Language is one such element in this system and holds a particular interest because of the mutual influence of language and identity in relation to other social factors.

> *"[I]dentity is never a priori, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an image of totality."* (Bhabha 1994: 51)

Drawing on Bhabha, this book is an attempt to explore a wide range of texts and contexts to better understand phenomena of identity. This book contains fourteen chapters, excluding the present one, and covers a variety of themes and notions of identity. The following section presents a brief description of the themes and perspectives dealt with by the contributors. This description in no way restricts the interpretations of readers and endeavours to facilitate a democratic exchange of ideas on the phenomenon of identity.

The following section briefly describes the central ideas contained in each chapter.

In *Making "Voices" from the Past Relevant in the Present: The Performative Function of English Translations of Sacred Hindu Texts*, **Rajeshwari V. Pandharipande** interprets the rewriting or translation of a source text as a performative act. Her goal is to show that the translator chooses a source text written in the past according to its sociocultural context, which closely resembles/reflects the present context (i.e. the social context of the translation). By translating the source text for a contemporary audience, the translator first locates the source text and its function in its original past moment and then relocates the text and its function into the present context. She indicates a need to examine contextual similarities and responses to translations in terms of the selection of source texts and the formation of identity across diverse cultural and linguistic spaces in the current era of globalization. These include: postcolonial translations; translations in hybrid and/or multilingual cultures and contexts; and translations in diasporas. One may readily ask how translators select source texts to 'localize' cultural identities in the face of globalization.

In *Caliban's Verses and Curses: The Dialect(ic)s of Subordination in Shakespeare's The Tempest—from Text to Film*, **Rahul K. Gairola** fuses a traditional close reading of text with a close reading of film to demonstrate the ways in which the identity of Caliban has varied, while essentially staying the same, over the centuries. The character of Caliban from Shakespeare's play of 1611 to John Gorrie's 1987 BBC film and, finally, to James Mangold's mutant namesake in 2017's *Logan*, seems to consistently occupy the dark side of subjectivity, both linguistically and filmically. While postcolonial discourse has arguably humanized Caliban to the point that he appears a gentle monster when transformed into Mangold's mutant, in his reading Caliban offers a twenty-first century allegory of the abject native in his/her own homeland, racialized and ordered to leave as the function of racialized exploitation comes full circle. Shakespeare's verses are curses on the very people for whom Caliban serves as an allegory, and remains significant today with militant white supremacy and extreme xenophobia haunting the very metropolises to which postcolonial immigrants have fled and where their children have been born. As he demonstrates throughout, the Manichean binary of light/dark cathects particularly well to the different cultural manifestations of Caliban—from the original text of the Elizabethan era to the filmic texts of the neoliberal/millennial eras. Caliban's language, image, and identity dwell together, as he demonstrates throughout his comparative empirical analysis,

on the underside of respectability as it is represented in the vernacular of spoken and lived existence. With respect to language and identity, we may continue to better understand the challenges of xenophobia and racialized power relations by looking at the familiar ways in which they have operated before, seeking out the ghosts of the past that today shape the monstrosity in textual and filmic language for which Caliban serves as an immortal allegory.

In *Dutiful Girls, Defiant Boys: Gendered Literary Imagination in the Works of Nazir Ahmad*, **Irfanullah Farooqi** engages with the gendered literary imagination of Nazir Ahmad, a renowned Muslim reformist in colonial India who is also considered by many to be a novelist. Through a close reading of two of his celebrated works, *Miratul Uroos* (The Bride's Mirror) and *Taubatun Nusooh* (The Repentance of Nusooh), he looks at how Nazir Ahmad's portrayal of girls and boys is extremely gendered. The progress of Nazir Ahmad's characters in these two literary creations clearly asserts a conventional understanding of domesticity and a host of attributes and traits associated with that realm/sphere. What follows also attempts to question Nazir Ahmad's reformist agenda—one where literature was essentially seen as educational—by outlining the narrowness of his understanding of womanhood. Farooqi observes that a critical engagement with Nazir Ahmad's literary production informs us that in his case writing is anything but an innocent act. It is thoroughly representational. By outlining the essentials of domesticity within the context of a *Sharif* household he simply tries to recast the important practices of *Ashraf* culture. Given that he is upsettingly clear about everything right at the outset, his ideal woman is not a new woman. Through his advice or useful literature, Nazir Ahmad was trying to restore the respectability of the *Ashraf* of Delhi. The *Sharif* woman was the site through which this quest for revival was expressed and therefore much of the expression around roles and responsibilities is heavily gendered. As he ventured more into articulating the essentials of womanhood and manhood within the context of the family, 'feminine' and 'masculine' became further defined and distinguished from each other.

Tasneem Shahnaaz, in her chapter *Speaking of Gender: Language and Identity in the poems of Adrienne Rich*, unravels an underlying preoccupation of Adrienne Rich with the close connection between reality and its linguistic representation. In her discovery of various representational voices in Rich's poetry, she observes that with few linguistic precursors or adequate tools to help her, Rich engaged with the problematic of locating/inventing a language that would have to address, define, and authenticate her pursuit of selfhood. She realized that in this journey there

is no unitary self that can be described and defined. There exists more than one self and it is the conjunction of these selves that delineate her selfhood. As such, there is an emergence of multiple voices in her poetry. At times she speaks through a persona as a textual 'I' while at others she is the lyric 'I,' the self-reflexive 'I,' the historical 'I,' the bardic 'I,' and even the prophetic 'I.' The pronoun 'I' is seemingly non-gender specific. The poetic 'I' usually denotes the generic 'he.' Rich's conscious decision to speak from a subject position involved "an immense shift from male to female pronouns."

Jayakrishnan Narayanan and **Rajesh Kumar** show how slang and identity have a causal relationship that can work in both directions. Their chapter on *Linguistic Vernacularization in Malayalam Cinema: Urban Kochi Slang and Youth Identity* discusses linguistic vernacularization (Coupland 2014) or de-standardization in Malayalam film through the rise of urban Kochi slang, its construction as a youth identity marker through films, and its acceptance among young audiences as fashionable. By analyzing and categorizing changes in the portrayal of the Kochi dialect in cinema over the years, this paper looks into the bricolage (Levi-Strauss 1966) of the film industry, which has caused a re-ordering and re-contextualization of linguistic and dialectal identities with enhanced social meaning.

The lives of African Americans in the racist society of America have been, and still are, difficult. The treatment of African Americans under slavery was brutal, harsh, and barbaric and reflected the pervasive misconception that blacks were less than human and more like animals and beasts of burden (Taylor 2007). Black women have been described as "outsiders twice over" (Carolyn Heilbrun 1979: 37), excluded from both the mainstream and from the ethnic centers of power. Some of these women were thrice muted through sexism, racism, and a 'tonguelessness' that resulted from oppression and language barriers. In *Avouching the Silenced Voices: The Inner Conflict of African Americans in Literary Accounts*, **Manjri Suman** and **Om Prakash** analyze fictional characters that have described African American experiences through the lens of Tajfel's (1979) social identity theory, which deals with *in-group* and *out-group* racism. People believe themselves to be part of a group and this increases their sense of pride and self-esteem. The male and female characters studied in this chapter break through barriers, search for their own identities, and establish more coherent identities by gaining a voice. Previously silent or ignorant characters go through many hardships, but emerge as strong personalities. They break through language

barriers, dilute the heavy weight of 'voicelessness,' and start speaking for themselves.

The chapter *Reasoning with Reason: Understanding the Conflict of Cultural Belief in Amitav Ghosh's The Circle of Reason*, by **Sukanya Mondal** and **Rashmi Gaur**, discusses identity and culture as two inextricably intertwined ideas, where a culture contributes significantly to the identity of an individual who belongs to that culture. Although culture informs a specific layer of one's identity, a person cannot be judged solely by the culture s/he belongs to, because a person's identity has too many dimensions to it. One's education, professional ethics, religious beliefs, and political ideology are all determining factors of one's identity. This chapter attempts to examine the relation between reason/rationality and the aforementioned factors of personal identity in the context of a particular situation in Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason*. The context here is the final episode of the novel where all the major characters assemble in Algeria and discuss the cremation of a dead body. In the course of this debate, different sides of the characters' identities gradually unfold and the process shows us that there are certain human values that question the tyranny of rationalism. What comes out of the debate, as well as the novel, is that the notion of identity has a confining quality. When a person like Dr. Mishra is overly conscious about retaining his carefully constructed identity, he unknowingly submits to the exertion of this binding force. In order to maintain his identity as a rationalist and a practitioner of science, he opposes the cremation of Kulfi's body. In this moment, he deliberately relegates the other layers of his identity—those of being an Indian, a Hindu, and above all, a human being. He forgets that this last part of his identity, that of being a human being, obliges him to honour the dead. Thus, by depicting the conflict among different parts of people's identities, Ghosh finally shows that in spite of cultural specificities, humanity has a universal appeal.

Multilingualism signifies an important aspect of diversity. It suggests the variations and differences that arise due to linguistic and cultural aspects, the differences in terms of the processes in which a writer is engaged, and the outcome in the form of the text that emerges. Multilingual writers cannot be considered to be part of a monolithic whole, but should be viewed as individual writers whose trends cannot be generalized. In her chapter on *Multilingualism and Identity: Authorial Identity in Academic Writing*, **Shagufta Imtiaz** draws on the work of identity theorists, who look at the ways in which race, gender, and class affect the process of language learning and teaching. The reading and writing process is central to second language acquisition and is socially structured. This study was not constructed in a

classroom setting. Considering that the learners had a medical background, they seemed to be motivated enough to indulge in reading for pleasure. As she observes, they were able to answer the questions related directly and indirectly to identity formation. The learners seemed to be motivated and interested in the practice of reading. The act of reading and writing re-situates and reconstructs their identity positions. The use of *I* as the theme in a sentence revokes this position, not only making the identity position more socially and historically embedded, but also constituting it in and through language.

India has been engulfed by identity politics, of various hues, for several decades now and such endeavours are only gaining in strength. The recent successes, at the political level, of a majoritarian politics based on religion clearly indicates the ascendancy of an identity politics of a particular kind. This rise in the prominence of identity politics has coincided with the advent of the free market economy in India, giving rise to serious debates on the correlation between the two. It is perhaps no coincidence that such a kind of politics is always accompanied by the rhetoric of 'development.' While this kind of politics may have gained prominence in recent times, it is by no means the case that identity politics did not exist before. In fact, the decision to organize parts of India along linguistic lines gave rise to movements based on linguistic sub-nationalism in various parts of the country. Challenging essentialism in identity-work is an important aspect of our attempts to make the path from the undifferentiated whole to a differentiated whole accessible. This challenge involves rethinking our ways of establishing relationships with nature, other people, and the self. We need to develop alternative paradigms of development that do not fragment us, but enable us to attain higher levels of unity. I do not wish to suggest that until we develop alternative paradigms there is nothing to be done. Striving for such paradigms and building upon incremental gains not only provides us with the path ahead, but also the inspiration to overcome the fragmentation imposed upon us. The notion of identity needs to be pragmatized, i.e. we need to talk about identities of situations. If we are able to create special situations (to the extent that it is possible) for the realization of higher identities, then small steps towards this aim can be taken. An awareness of such fragmentation, an understanding of the dynamics behind it, and the steps needed to overcome it (even if only partially) will bring people together and provide them with an environment to overcome the limitations imposed upon them. For example, we have discussed the need for a neutral space where people of different backgrounds can meet and integrate in a meaningful and democratic way. In linguistic terms, this neutral ground would be languages of wider communication. **Avinash**

Pandey in his chapter on *Identity-Work in Complex Societies* identifies such neutral spaces, which have been encroached upon by languages of the elite. Recovering ground for these languages and enabling their use in the public sphere forms an important part of our attempts to overcome fragmentation. Though this would of course be a long-term strategy, he insists, on a more immediate basis, on making the languages in use for wider communication accessible to marginalized communities. Such a dual strategy, which on the surface seems contradictory, is laced with teething problems and runs the risk of losing out. But then such risks always accompany attempts to deal with real problems and real people—purity is a quality of the abstract and we need to dirty our hands and take risks, he declares.

Shreesh Chaudhary in his chapter *Identity and Pronunciation* highlights a very significant correlation between pronunciation and perceived identity. In this chapter, he first describes how some aspects of speech are crucial to the identity of a speaker and need not necessarily be unlearnt, the features of accent that define regional and ethnic identity, and the relative importance of different features of English phonology for a course in Standard English (SE). Finally, he suggests an approach to the teaching of SE that allows the learner to retain their identity and yet understand and be understood by speakers of standard varieties of English worldwide. He claims that since this approach does not involve any 'unlearning,' it can be used for teaching speaking in any language to any group of learners. It should be obvious to any teacher that no language needs to be spoken exactly alike in all respects by all its learners. Some features of any language must essentially be learnt by all, otherwise their speech may not be normally intelligible, but in some others each learner should have freedom of choice. What is more important is that non-native speakers of all languages are seen and accepted as non-native learners. They are understood and appreciated for the efforts they make in picking up someone else's language. They retain their identity not just in appearance, but also in speech without in any manner incurring an exorbitant cost for doing so. The precious time saved in learning trifling features of a standard language can be better invested in learning more words and idioms and acquiring greater confidence in speaking that language though practice in and outside the classroom. This goal is both achievable and may motivate the learner to speak at any possible and available moment. He observes that pronunciation should promote understanding without degrading the identity of the speaker. As a recent work in this area suggests, let us not produce parrots; rather, let us produce people who retain their identity, but are understood in the wider world.

In *The Social Construction of Identity: A Sociolinguistic Approach* **Syed Nadeem Fatmi** attempts a sociolinguistic analysis of identity construction. This chapter focuses on the idea that 'identity' refers to either a social category defined by membership rules, attributes, and expected behaviours, or socially distinguishing features that a person takes special pride in. In the latter sense, identity is related to the formulation of dignity, pride, or honour, implicitly linking these to various social categories. He further argues that this provides a better understanding of how identity is socially constructed. Finally, he also argues that sociolinguistic analysis is a valuable tool in the clarification of social science concepts that have strong roots in everyday speech. His discussion of identity and language use in sociological perspective is based on several key premises. It replaces the traditional understanding of language users as unitary, unique, and internally motivated individuals with a view of them as social actors whose identities are multiple, varied, and emergent in their everyday lived experience. Through involvement in their socio-culturally significant activities, individuals take on or inhabit particular social identities and use their understandings of their social roles and relationships with others to mediate their involvement and the involvement of others in their practices. He considers these identities not to be stable or constant across contexts, but rather to be emergent, locally situated, and, at the same time, historically constituted—they are constantly reconstituted in our discourses. While language is a socio-historical product, language is also an instrument for forming and transforming the social order as well as identity. Such a view of language and identity leads us to articulate the relationship between the structures of society on the one hand and the nature of human action on the other. An important focus of study shifts towards the identification of the different ways individuals use the cues available to them in various communicative encounters in the construction of social identities.

Every generation and every individual challenges the dominant discourses of language and identity of their time, attempting to make sense of the socio-political contexts in which they often engage with multiple languages, especially in terms of their livelihood or survival. In *Language is Thicker than Blood: A Personal Reflection on Language and Identity in India*, **S. P. Dhanavel** presents his personal account of being a Tamil speaker who learnt English and chose English as a means of living, not in his native state, but in a different linguistic environment far away from his home, which enabled him to realize the truth of the statement that language is thicker than blood. This account may be considered a self-reflective documentation of a complex interaction between language and identity in a multilingual and multicultural country. This narrative illustrates his linguistic and social

identity as a Tamil speaker, an English teacher, and an Indian citizen. Primarily, it shows how non-contact with one's mother tongue/native language can be traumatic and destabilize the individual. Additionally, it explains how coming into conflict with a dominant language can cause socio-political problems within a country that can threaten the stability of the country itself. The underlying meaning and message of this narrative is that the linguistic identity that one forms in childhood continues to play a key role in all personal and professional relations and responsibilities. What is needed is a tolerant approach to linguistic diversity, which can create an accommodating environment for speakers of different languages to co-exist, without which the co-existence of human beings will remain a distant dream.

Storytelling is a powerful way of getting a message across to an audience, as there is willingness and openness to receive a story and the message is not shoved down the audience's throats, but travels gently in the story-capsule, into the minds of the listeners, who are biologically programmed to facilitate a narrative framework. In her chapter on *Language, Stories, and Identity*, **Deepa Kiran** demonstrates the art and significance of storytelling and its long cultural history and tradition. She underlines the importance of Storytelling, which connects us and breaks down barriers between people—stories help us make meaning in our lives, help make sense of ourselves as part of a community, help us transmit our learning to the next generation, and ensure that important things are well-remembered.

Hemachandran Karah in *Discourse and the Problem of Structural Power: a Note on the Missing Story of Human Vulnerability in the Interchange* uses his personal accounts and experiences to observe that, in an epoch when all things seem relativistic and contextual, one can still spot a score of phenomena that are absolutely universal. Vulnerability is definitely one such phenomenon, for it does not spare anyone, including the most privileged of us. He argues that an overarching system of power, such as patriarchy, may perpetuate itself by hijacking people's personhood, so that the latter becomes a site for dominance. Discourse analysis involves a plethora of frameworks, such as 'subjugation,' 'internalized oppression,' and 'docility' to capture the performance of power. Furthermore, in reviewing a powerplay that seems intangible and yet formidable, discourse-based scholarly enterprises unfold with the conviction that a hijacked personhood is the ultimate manifestation of human vulnerability. At its best, such a conviction is salutary. For example, during moments of enslavement by a harmful discourse, one may become nothing more than an attenuated play of signifiers. That is not all—social contracts run the risk of

delegitimization when they are upheld by communities who themselves are dispersed from within. While such a critique is almost thorough, it is limited by the worldview that human vulnerability is noticeable only within a social contract situation. After all, is it not true that a failed social contract is a clear symptom of an underlying vulnerability? Although such self-referential questions seem indisputable, there exist myriad narrative themes of vulnerability that slip through the cracks. In gathering together these narrative themes, he makes use of the concept of moral paradox. The idea of moral paradox is not a novel invention. It is very active in other contexts, such as religious texts and philosophical treatises. He deploys moral paradox in a philosophical sense that is fine-tuned to capture less-acknowledged stories of vulnerability. What follows is a fictional narrative that may resemble many such stories of vulnerability that slip between the cracks.

Last but not the least, we firmly believe that this book will trigger a renewed discourse on text, context, and identity. We are humbled by the overwhelming response and unconditional patience extended to us by our colleagues, friends, and contributors during the making of this book. We cannot thank enough Victoria Carruthers, Robert Pomfret, Anthony Wright, Matthew Scott, and Helen Edwards for their continued help and support in bringing this book to light. Finally, we extend our gratitude to the many individuals who have directly and indirectly supported us in our endeavor.

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CHAPTER TWO

MAKING "VOICES" FROM THE PAST RELEVANT IN THE PRESENT: THE PERFORMATIVE FUNCTION OF ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF SACRED HINDU TEXTS[1]

RAJESHWARI V. PANDHARIPANDE

"The translator is no stand-in or ventriloquist for the author of the source text, but a resourceful imitator who rewrites it to appeal to another audience in a different language and culture and often in a different period" (Venuti 2013: 109).

1. Introduction

Venuti's remark captures the agency of both the source text and the translator operating in different times and different languages. In this paper, I interpret the rewriting or translating of a source text as a performative act. My goal is to show that the translator chooses a source text written in the past according to its sociocultural context, which closely resembles/reflects the present context (i.e. the social context of the translation). By translating the source text for a contemporary audience, the translator first locates the source text and its function in its original past moment and then relocates the text and its function into the present context.

I will discuss three English translations/interpretations of the following sacred texts of Hinduism: *Speaking of Shiva*, Ramanujan's (1973) translations of a twelfth century Virashaiva poetry in Kannada; *Tukaram: Says Tuka*, Chitre's (1991) translation of *Tukaramanchi Gatha*, a seventeenth century

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religious text in Marathi; and Prabhupada's (1968) English translation of the third century Sanskrit text, the *Bhagavadgita*, *Bhagavadgita As it is.* The main goals of this paper are: to show that these English translations of the source texts, in their respective historical social contexts, rejected the 'colonization' or hegemony of 'high' religion, Hinduism and established the religious roots of Hinduism for the common people; b) to point out that through these translations, the translators relocate the past and re-create it in postcolonial, present-time India (where the loss of cultural roots and the need to recreate Indian cultural identity is strongly felt); and c) to re-establish the roots and identity of the self (individually and nationally) by de-colonizing them through translation in postcolonial India (mirroring their effect in the present). It is important to note that Prabhupada's translation of the *Bhagavadgita* is different from the first two: it relocates the source text in the USA and makes it relevant to twentieth century America by creating a counter-cultural construct different from the mainstream US culture, mirroring the role of the source text in fifteenth century India (when the text was interpreted as resisting 'high' religion).

Finally, I will discuss the relevance of this thesis for the theory of translation. I propose translation to be a performative linguistic act, which performs an additional function of identity construction.

2. The Performative Function of Translation: Identity Construction

Before I proceed to discuss the performative function of translation, it is necessary to briefly describe speech act theory (Austin 1962; Searle 1969), which defines the performative function of language. In this discussion, I will assume the applicability of speech act theory to the translations at hand. According to this theory, language can perform an action as it describes it. The uttering of a performative is, or is part of, the doing of a certain kind of action (Austin later deals with these acts under the name *illocutionary acts*), the performance of which would not normally be described as simply 'saying' or 'describing' something (cf. Austin 1962: 5). For example, when the priest says, 'I declare you man and wife,' he performs the action of marrying a couple. I claim that the translations at hand serve the performative function of making the voices/meaning/function of the original texts in the past relevant to the present. In doing this, the translator creates a new space for translation between the past and the present.

This discussion addresses an age-old question in translation theory: what is the relationship between the original/source text and its translation? I will assume, but not discuss, the translation theories and approaches of: formal-structural translation; semantic equivalence; translation as transformation; interpretation; transcreation; and adaptation of the original, among others. My approach to conceptualizing the relationship between a source text and a translation in the postcolonial context in India treats translation as a performative action that makes the translation functionally equivalent to the source text. What motivates the translation is the socio-cultural-contextual equivalence of the two—the source and the translation.

My view accords with Vermeer's functional view of translation:

> "Each text is produced for a given purpose and should serve this purpose. The skopos rule thus reads as follows: translate/interpret/speak/write in a way that enables your text/translation to function to the situation in which it is used and with the people who want to use it and precisely in the way they want it to function" (Vermeer 1989: 20, translation by Nord in Pym 2010: 204).

Why am I calling this translation a performative act rather than simply a purposive action? The reason is, a performative act, as expressed in the work of Austin and Searle, emphasizes a culturally/conventionally determined correlation between a linguistic structure/construction and its function. It is thus part of the grammar of a culture. The priest's declaration in the wedding is a culturally determined performative, which, when used, expresses an action in a particular culture (and this may not be the case in other cultures). I claim that the translator assumes this conventionalized correlation between the source text and its function in the past. As such, a translator chooses the source text to make its function or 'voice' relevant to the present, with the assumption that the translation will perform a similar function in a new space/time, but in a similar context.

The translation of sacred texts is a well-established tradition in most world religions (Sawyer 2001). While English translations of the sacred texts of Hinduism have been discussed in the context of Indian literature, world literature, philosophy, and psychology, the other important 'performative' function of these translations has not been adequately recognized/analyzed. That is, these translations have been instrumental in constructing Hindu/Indian identity at different points in time.

3. Postcolonial Translations of Religious Texts: A Return to Vernacular Religion and Decolonizing the 'Self'

First, I will provide a brief description of postcolonial translation in India. In the postcolonial period, after the 1960s, we see a large number of writers and translators unambiguously expressing their anxiety about the loss of national, cultural, and personal identity and the need to reclaim/redefine it through writing and translation. Sacred texts are generally considered an important part of a country's cultural heritage. Therefore, large scale translations of the Hindu sacred texts can be seen as a strategy for re-building lost national and cultural identity. What is interesting is that these translators did not choose the ancient Sanskrit texts (the Vedas or the Upanishads), but rather texts originally written in vernacular regional languages. As Ketkar points out:

> "Earlier on, 'truly Indian meant pan-Indian Sanskrit heritage.' In the case of modernists, Indianness means precolonial heritage in modern Indian languages as well. Translation becomes one of the inevitable and creative strategies of giving oneself a sense of belonging and a nationality. It is a part of re-building national and personal identity" (2004: 3).

In postcolonial India, we find two types of English translations of sacred Hindu texts: those where the source texts are in Sanskrit; and those where the source texts are in regional languages. Notable examples drawing on Sanskrit texts include: Aurobindo's translation of Vidyapati, the Upanishads, and the Bhagavadgita; and P. Lal's English translation of the entire Hindu epic cycle, the Mahabharata, and many other Hindu texts including 21 major Upanishads. The following remarks by translators succinctly underscore the strong motivations that inform the choice of sacred Hindu texts for translation. P. Lal, speaking about the rationale for choosing Sanskrit religious texts as sources for his English translation, says:

> "I soon realized that an excessive absorption in the milieu and tradition of English is divorcing me from the values that I found all around me as an experiencing Indian, so I undertook the translation of Indian—in practice mostly Hindu sacred texts—in the hope of that the intimacy that only translation can give (I underscore the word 'intimacy') would enable me to know better what the Indian myth was, how it invigorated Indian literature and what values one would pick up from it that would be of use as an 'Indian' human being and as an Indian using a so-called foreign language (English)" (in St. Pierre 1997: 143-144).

This clearly shows that the motivation for these postcolonial translators was to regain and rebuild their identity in the face of the influence of British cultural hegemony.

In the light of this, we move to the first English translation of Tukaram's poetry. Dilip Chitre's remark on his own English translation of Tukaram is important to understanding its performative function (what it does as opposed to what it says). Chitre repeatedly emphasizes the loss of Indian identity through colonization:

> "Why I felt compelled to translate his [Tukaram was a seventeenth century Hindu poet who wrote his magnum opus in Marathi] poetry as bilingual poet, I had little choice, if any. There were two parts of me, like two linguistic and cultural hemispheres, and as per theory, they were not destined to cohere" (2003: 307)

And

> "I have been working in a haunted workshop rattled and shaken by the spirits of other literatures unknown to my ancestor I have to build a bridge within myself between India and Europe or else, I become a fragmented person" (2003: 311-312).

Ramanujan, who chose the writings of the Vacanas, poems written in Kannada by twelfth century saints, says: "one chooses and translates a part of one's past to make it present to oneself and maybe to others" (in Dharwadkar 1999: 122-123). Translation becomes a strategy to give oneself one's roots. In the above statements of the translators, it is clear that they view translation as part of a strategy of identity-building.

I wish to show that the translators aimed to achieve their goal by making a strong performative statement. The texts were originally composed to overthrow the hegemony of 'high Hinduism' marked by Brahmin-dominated religious texts (in Sanskrit) and ritual practices, which typically excluded the lower castes. The postcolonial social context in India, in which the cultural hegemony of the British is clearly felt, remarkably mirrored this historical context.

3.1 Chitre's Translation of Tukaram

We can begin with Chitre's English translation of Tukaram's sacred Hindu text, Tukaramanchi Gatha, from Marathi, a regional vernacular language of the state of Maharashtra. The original text challenges the high religious conceptualization of religious Hinduism and its practices, and boldly

articulates the Hindu identity of the common (primarily non-Brahmin) people.

Tukaram is known for his strong rejection of the Brahmin pandits and saints and their preaching of varnashram dharma (caste-based religion), which not only excluded the lower castes from practicing religious rituals, but also ostracized them for their low birth by blaming it on past karma. Tukaram says:

> *Doii vaadhavuunii kesha, bhuute aaNiitii angaas tarii te naahii santa jana |tethe naahii aatmakhuuNa* (Tukaramanchi Gatha 144 verse 776).

> "By growing long hair and rubbing ashes all over their body, they do not become true saints. There is no sign in them of the ultimate soul-identity. They ask money for (performing) the worship ritual" (Tukaramanchi Gatha 147 verse 798:2).

> *Puujelaagii dravya maage| kaaya saange shishyaate?*

> "What can they tell their disciples?"

Tukaram repeatedly articulates the futility of the ritual practices of fasting, renunciation of family ties, and withdrawal to the forest, which were all part of the Hindu tradition. He says that without real devotion-internal purity all of this this is futile:

> *Nako saaNDU anna,nako sevuu vana, chitti naarayaNa sarva bhogii.*

> "Don't give up food; don't go to the forest; don't abandon family. What is important is, remember Narayana (God), all the time. That is the real ritual" (Tukaramnchi Gatha 239 verse 13680).

There is a strong rejection of these ascetic religious practices and embedded therein is a discourse reinterpreting Hinduism and one's identity as a Hindu. I mention just one practice that he repeatedly insists as central to Hinduism: the practice of repeating God's name, *naama japa*. Tukaram argued for the superiority of the ritual of *naamasamkirtan* (the ritual repetition of God's name) because it did not discriminate between the castes:

> *hechii maaze tapa hechii maaze daana | hechii anushThaan naama tuze*

> "Your name is my austerities, it is my charity, it is my ritual, your name!" (Tukaramanchi Gatha 616 verse 3755).

> "The one who takes on God's name, there is no discrimination for him of castes. When it rains, the water goes to the Ganges, all of it! Similarly, all

castes are the same. They all go to God. When different kinds of wood, may
it be sandalwood or any other kind, when placed in the fire, become one and
same, everyone who utters God's name goes to God regardless of his caste"
(Tukaramanchi Gatha 627 verse 3827).

aamhaa gharii dhana shabdaanchiica ratne|
shabdaanchiica shastre tatna karuu|
shabdachi aamucyaa jiivaance jiivana|
shabde vaaTuu dhana janalokaa|
tukaa mhaNe paahaa shabdachi haa deva|
shabdachi gaurava puujaa karuu||

"Words are the only Jewels I possess;
Words are the only clothes I wear;
Words are the only food that sustains my life;
Words are the only wealth I distribute among people" (Chitre 1991: 1).

Chitre, in his translation of Tukaram, makes Tukaram's voice of overthrowing
the hegemony of the Brahmins heard in the present postcolonial moment after
British cultural, linguistic, and political hegemony had washed away 'true
Indian' identity; Chitre's translation has a performative function in the
twentieth century postcolonial period. The translation reconstructs Indian
identity against the colonial establishment. Just as Tukaram disowned his
caste identity and directly connected with God (through his *naama*), the
translator breaks the veil of the colonial structure and reaches out to the
roots of his true identity. For Chitre, Tukaram's Brahmin becomes the
metaphor for the colonial regime:

"The Brahmin
The *brahmin* who flies into a rage at the touch of a *mahar (person who
belongs to low caste)*
—that is no *brahmin*,
The only absolution for such a *brahmin*
Is to die for his own sin.
He who refuses to touch a *chandal (untouchable low-caste person)*
Has a polluted mind.
Says Tuka, a man is only as chaste
As his own belief" (Chitre 1991: 115).

This is a redefinition of social stratification (not on the basis of caste, but on
purity and chastity of belief—the purer the belief, the higher the person on
the scale). Embedded in this is a redefinition of religion and its practices
and, ultimately, a redefinition of one's self. The following quote is taken
from Chitre's translation where God is metaphorized as a ghost: