

Postcolonial Translation: The Case of South Asia

In this paper I wish to offer some preliminary observations on the outcome of an ongoing research network entitled “Postcolonial Translation: The Case of South Asia”. This network is a collaboration among scholars based in the UK and in India, specialists in different South Asian languages and literatures. Our first workshop was held in Delhi in January 2009, and consisted of a series of seminars that focused on the theme of translation and bilingualism in five languages: Bengali, English, Hindi, Malayalam and Tamil. The workshops brought together academics, translators, and editors and showed a vibrant and flourishing translation scene in contemporary India.¹ In the course of the paper, I would like to provide a brief historical overview of the most salient moments in the history of translation in South Asia, offer some general observations on the role of translation in contemporary Indian literary culture, and some comments on ‘Indian English’ as a rapidly evolving literary idiom that has begun to acquire its own homegrown audience in India. I conclude by discussing some of the insights and observations that emerged out of our language-specific and thematic workshops.

¹ I am conscious that throughout this essay, though I speak of ‘South Asia’, I am mainly referring to ‘Indian’ examples of translation practice and theory. Our network aims to look beyond the confines of the Indian nation-state to explore the transnational and diasporic dimensions of the five languages mentioned above, but this objective will be the topic of our future workshops. Here I offer merely some preliminary and provisional observations that focus principally on India.

² See for example Rukmini Bhaya Nair, ed., *Translation, Text, and Theory: The Paradigm of India* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2002); Rita Kothari, *Translating India* (Manchester: St Jerome, 2003); GJV Prasad, ed., *Journal of the School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies*, special issue on Translation Studies (Autumn 2008); Nalini Iyer and Bonnie Zare, eds., *Other Tongues: Rethinking the Language Debates in India*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009).

³ Kothari, *Translating India*, 6.

Though translation has historically been a central factor in the evolution of literary culture in the subcontinent, the field of South Asian translation studies is still significantly under-theorized. However, recent years have witnessed a greatly increased scholarly interest that goes in hand with the renewed vitality of translation projects taking place all over the region.² In many ways, translation is a quotidian aspect of linguistic interaction in the subcontinent; the fact that many South Asians operate with at least two languages in everyday life (urban and peri-urban Indians may even speak three different languages) “is an informal and unstudied part of daily life in India”.³ Among the four nation-states comprising South Asia, namely India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, India is characterized by the greatest number of languages. The Indian Constitution recognizes 18 official languages, plus numerous other languages and dialects. This situation of multi-lingualism means that national identity in India was not premised on a single linguistic identity, unlike the case of many Western nation-states. What consequences does this have for an attempt to map out the contours of a national literary system? Our project aims to explore the central role played by translation in the development of literary canons in South Asia. We propose to develop an in-depth collaborative study of the mutual exchanges between contemporary writing in Bengali, English, Hindi, Malayalam, and Tamil, in order to identify models of ‘postcolonial

translation' that can help us to understand South Asian literature as a multi-lingual corpus of texts. These five languages were chosen for a variety of reasons. I lack the space here to give a comprehensive overview of their rich histories, each of them boasting more speakers than most of the major European languages. Firstly, they are all official state languages. Hindi and English are also the official languages of India, as well as being languages of the national public sphere (the national media use Hindi and English as their privileged medium of expression, and India's film industry relies on Hindi cinema as its major product). As Rita Kothari notes, though Hindi is the most widely spoken language of India, the status of English is closely guarded by "ideological, regional and class interests".⁴ Tamil and Malayalam are two of the most important languages spoken in South India, and Tamil in particular has a long and illustrious literary history, as it is one of the classical languages of the subcontinent alongside Sanskrit. Bengali has 207 million native speakers⁵ and a rich and sophisticated literary-intellectual tradition. Most crucially, all of the languages have been important source languages and host languages for translation. They represent widely differing geographical and cultural areas of the Indian subcontinent.

The focus on these five languages pays particular attention to the distinction made in the Indian context between 'horizontal' translation, namely that which occurs between the *bhashas*, and 'vertical' translation, namely that which occurs from the *bhashas* into English. These adjectives are telling in the way that they signal the inherent power relations that obtain between English and the other languages of the subcontinent. English, quite aside from its colonial heritage, is also the language that signals privileged socio-economic status in South Asia, as the poet Vikram Seth recognizes: "English! Six-armed god,/ Key to a job, to power,/ Snobbery, the good life,/ This separateness, this fear".⁶ As these lines highlight, however, English also contains the inherent potential for dislocation and alienation from one's mother tongue.

Within the ambit of these five languages, our network aims to focus on the way in which translation has shaped, and is shaping, a developing corpus that one might call, provisionally, 'South Asian literature'. It is undeniable that English, for good or for bad, plays a central role as a link-language between various South Asian language-literatures, not least because it is the most significant host language for translation. Some have gone so far as to argue that, together with Hindi, it is the language in which 'Indian' literature in particular takes on a 'national' dimension. A text will be canonized nationally if it is translated into English. Multi-national publishers tend to produce books in English, with some notable exceptions (and their books are priced significantly higher than those in the *bhashas*). But is there a way to decentre the role of English in canon formation, and if so, how?

⁴ Idem, 31.

⁵ "Languages spoken by more than ten million people", *Encarta*, <http://encarta.msn.com/media_701500404/Languages_Spoken_by_More_Than_10_Million_People.html>, 19 June 2009.

⁶ Vikram Seth, "Divali", *The Poems: 1981-1994* (New Delhi: Viking, 1994), 66.

⁷ Emily Apter, "Global *Translatio*: The 'Invention' of Comparative Literature, Istanbul, 1933", in Christopher Prendergast, ed., *Debating World Literature* (London: Verso, 2004), 77.

⁸ Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature", in Prendergast, ed., *Debating World Literature*, 151.

A possible answer might lie in thinking of South Asian literature in terms of a network connecting multiple language-literatures; thus the most productive approach for studying it is to view it in terms of a comparative literature. Comparative literature by definition brings together bodies of writing in different languages, and is premised on an acceptance of multilingualism as a structural characteristic of the canon. "Lacking a specific country, or single national identity, comparative literature necessarily works towards a non-nationally defined disciplinary focus, pinning high stakes on successfully negotiating the pitfalls of *Weltliteratur*, especially in an increasingly globalized economy governed by transnational exchanges and flows".⁷ Conceptualizing South Asian literature as a comparative literature, whose various corpora are connected together through translation, allows us to escape the national bias that is still so prevalent in literary studies today. Bengali, English, Hindi, Malayalam, and Tamil all have a transnational reach that cannot be captured by a focus on their usage on the part of speakers bound by national borders.

Thus scholars who wish to develop some lines of interpretation and systematization of literature in South Asia might do well to heed Franco Moretti's urge to enact forms of "distant reading" which are at the basis of any attempt to write a literary history that spans different languages. In referring to the possibilities of sketching out the contours of a world literature, Moretti advocates a form of second-hand literary history: "a patchwork of other people's research, *without a single direct textual reading*. Still ambitious, and actually even more so than before... but the ambition [of the project] is now directly proportional to *the distance from the text*".⁸ If in "distant reading", as Moretti says, "distance is a condition of knowledge", then translation can be understood as a very concrete form of "distant reading" on which scholars rely to investigate the possibility, if not of a civilizational unity, then of a civilizational coherence and emergence of common trends, "family resemblances" to use Wittgenstein's term, among the diversity of literatures in South Asia.

When formulating this project on translation, we were conscious of the sharp divide that exists between the study of South Asian languages and literatures, and postcolonial literary studies. What was clearly evident was that the study of 'postcolonial Indian literature' tended to imply a monolingual and mostly Anglophone focus, and was thus mainly situated in English Literature departments. Moreover, the canon of postcolonial Indian literature rarely included Indian literature in English translation, and only considered a small body of texts written in English. This focus restricted its usefulness for exploring the multicultural and polyglot context of literary production in postcolonial South Asia as well as fostering a schizophrenic view of Indian literature as divided between the literature in the *bhasha* languages and the literature produced in English. Francesca

Orsini has argued that there are several distinct literary formations in India, due to the circulation, the publishing opportunities, and the readership of English-language literature and *bhasha* literature. She distinguishes between institutions of regional, national, and world literature in India, each characterized by different publishers, their place in the educational system, different sets of journals, literary associations, and prizes.⁹ Thus the panorama of South Asian literary production, with reference to India in particular, appears fragmented, with little communication or overlap between these quite distinct literary spheres. A reader of Hindi fiction is likely to belong to a very different socio-economic class from a reader of Anglophone fiction, and the urban-rural divide is an additional line of demarcation in the heterogeneous audience of South Asian literature. However, our project aims to focus on the inter-relatedness between literary production in different Indian languages, including English, and we seized on translation as the key process through which one can understand this inter-relatedness. Kothari notes how the exchanges between major and minor streams in Indian literature have taken place largely through translation.¹⁰ Thus we should not view translation in South Asia as merely a process that privileges English as the language of translation, at the expense of production of, and exchange among, the *bhasha* languages; on the contrary, we can view the translating process as a “way to *vary* the major language”, in Lawrence Venuti’s formulation.¹¹

Until quite recently, translation in India tended to be understood as little other than an institutional practice that ‘nursed’ *bhasha* literatures, and was mainly funded by state bodies such as the Sahitya Akademi and the National Book Trust. The first phase of translation activity in India after independence in 1947 was supported almost entirely by the Indian government as a way of fostering nation-building and the development of a national literary canon, deemed essential to the foundation of an Indian public sphere. “The systematic identification, translation and publication of regional writing in English was first undertaken by the state-supported Sahitya Akademis in the 1950s and 60s”.¹² The purpose of the Sahitya Akademis was to “encourage cross-cultural exchange within India and present the best of our literary output to those whose mother tongues are not the same as the works translated”.¹³ In this phase, Ritu Menon argues that non-commercial considerations were primary, whereas the quality of translation and production values were secondary, while marketing, distribution, and critical attention were, and continue to be, disappointing, in her view.

The second phase of translation activity in India, spanning the 70s and 80s, witnessed a stronger commercial orientation by publishers of regional writing, such as Jaico, Hind Pocket Books, Oxford University Press’s Three Crowns series, Vikas, Bell, and Penguin. This phase was characterized by

⁹ Francesca Orsini, “India in the Mirror of World Fiction”, in Prendergast, ed., *Debating World Literature*, 328.

¹⁰ Kothari, *Translating India*, 38.

¹¹ Lawrence Venuti, “Introduction”, special issue on Translation and Minority, *The Translator: Studies in Intercultural Communication* 4.2 (1998), 137.

¹² Ritu Menon, “Authorial Submissions: Publishing and Translation”, in Nair, ed., *Translation, Text, and Theory: The Paradigm of India*, 123.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Idem, 125.

an improvement in distribution and marketing, and much greater attention to the quality of the translation. But the books still proved quite difficult to sell, and eventually Oxford University Press, Vikas and Bell Books stopped publishing altogether. The third and most recent phase of translation activity in India is characterized by a renewed attention to the vitality of *bhasha* literatures, and a commitment on the part of publishers to see them better represented in translation. In the late 80s and 90s, three different publishers “set about publishing fiction and poetry in translation with a clearly defined editorial focus, a carefully worked out acquisition and selection process, and a distinct marketing strategy”.¹⁴ These publishers were Kali for Women, Penguin India, and Katha, founded in 1984, 1985, and 1988 respectively. Katha in recent times has come to dominate the scene of Indian literature in translation; it is a non-governmental organization working on sustainable learning and as a story research and resource centre, through which it fosters translations, especially of short stories. Unlike the Sahitya Akademi, which does not devote particular effort to ensuring circulation and audience for its translations, increasing access is the primary goal of the Katha project. The editors at Katha are also less constrained than the state academies by the need to represent the largest possible number of Indian languages, whereas the Sahitya Akademi is institutionally bound to represent all major and minor Indian languages, including the oral languages. In the last few decades, translation activity in India has shifted from a state-sponsored venture to a series of exciting literary initiatives actively promoted by major national and multi-national publishers.

The mission of Katha is to foster good English translations of *bhasha* texts, thus addressing a significant gap in Indian publishing, where until quite recently translations were often error-strewn and there was little editorial intervention. At Katha, the editors work very closely with the translators on the text. The language of English translations has produced different varieties of English in relationship to the *bhasha* source language, as one of the Katha editors has commented:

At Katha, we try as far as possible to assimilate into English the rhythms, tones, nuances of the *bhasha* or *boli* [dialect], without compromising readability, the story or the writer. But yes, every text throws up new challenges and demands that the English bends, twists and breaks and reshapes and relocates itself accordingly. So you could say that there are as many Englishes as there are *bhashas* or texts. Because we believe forcing a pan-Indian English on these translations would defeat their very purpose.¹⁵

¹⁵ Moyna Mazumdar, “Response”, *Postcolonial Translation: the Case of South Asia*, <http://www.postcolonialtranslation.net/workshop_reports.php>, 20 June 2009.

Thus translation is changing the very face of Indian English, by a simultaneous domestication and foreignization of the source language. Translation can benefit, and not merely marginalize, the minority language that is involved in the process, and can subvert the major language. As

Venuti remarks, “a minor language is that of a politically dominated group, but also language use that is heterogeneous, that deviates from the standards, varies the consonants”.¹⁶ English in the South Asian literary context, as a link-language of translation, can be, and is constantly minoritized and de-territorialized through code-mixing, transfers of context, and hybridization: “Languages often reveal their minor status through the impact that translating has made on them, measured through the volume of loan words and calque renderings from hegemonic languages”.¹⁷ This is especially evident in Indian English writing, where authors constantly transform the English they are using through the insertion of Hindi words and the syntactical imitation of Indian sentence structure. This procedure is akin to what Moradewun Adejunmobi, within the context of Europhone African literature, calls a “compositional translation”, namely “texts which are published in European languages and which contain occasional or sustained modification of the conventions of the European language in use, where ‘versions’ or ‘originals’ in indigenous African languages are non-existent”.¹⁸ Writers such as Upamanyu Chatterjee and Arundhati Roy Indianize the English and thus produce a non-standard version that is arguably as South Asian as texts in English translation, such as Qurratulain Hyder’s *River of Fire*, originally published in Urdu in 1960, and translated into English by the author herself in 1997.

It is important at this point to introduce and explicate the term ‘postcolonial’ in relationship to literary translation in South Asia. Translation has emerged as a key theoretical concept in postcolonial studies with particular emphasis on colonial India: as a ‘metaphor’ of the colony, as a mode of transaction, as a ‘supplementary’ site of culture, and as ‘epistemic violence’. The British, in formulating a language policy for education and governance in the colonial territory, oscillated between two different approaches to the ‘ungovernable’ multi-lingualism of India, namely Orientalism and Anglicism. The earlier cultural policy, Orientalism, aimed to educate British colonial officers and natives elites in the many languages spoken in the subcontinent. The colonial literary discourse exemplified in Rudyard Kipling’s late imperial novel, *Kim* (1901), retains this ideology, conveying the sense that if, as a would-be colonizer, you are not fluent in Indian languages and cultures, then you are not fit to govern the colony. Kim, who is “burnt black as any native”, appreciates the British officer Colonel Creighton because of his command of Urdu: “Then the Colonel... turned to fluent and picturesque Urdu, and Kim was contented. No man could be a fool who knew the language so intimately, who moved so gently and silently, and whose eyes were so different from the dull fat eyes of other Sahibs”.¹⁹ An intimate knowledge of the linguistic terrain is seen as equivalent to an intimate knowledge of the thought-processes and ways of life of the colonized, thus the Other is made one’s own; and

¹⁶ Venuti, “Introduction”, 136.

¹⁷ Venuti, “Introduction”, 137.

¹⁸ Moradewun Adejunmobi, “Translation and Postcolonial Identity: African Writing and European Languages”, *The Translator* 4.2 (1998), 165.

¹⁹ Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1901; repr. 1987), 118.

the dialogues of the novel mimic the syntactic structures of Hindi, conveying simultaneously the linguistic exoticism of India, by stressing its 'archaic' and formalized speech-patterns, and the omniscient control of the narrator over the various native voices of the text.

Orientalism in the British educational policy was largely prevalent in the colony until its defeat by a more successful policy spearheaded by Thomas Babington Macaulay, namely Anglicism. Orientalism consisted of educating both the colonial and the native elite in the indigenous languages, while imposing a European discursive framework on the organization and systematization of Indian culture. A symbol of this ideology in *Kim* is the Lahore Museum, or the Ajaib-Gher (the Wonder House) as it is known to the locals: "The Museum was given up to Indian arts and manufactures, and anybody who sought wisdom could ask the curator to explain"(4). The truth about these objects is reconstructed and transformed into a tangible form of 'wisdom', and offered back to the natives by the British curator in an act of colonial magnanimity. The passage below highlights the value placed on Orientalism as a cultural strategy:

'My order is to take thee to the school'. The driver used the 'thou', which is rudeness when applied to a white man. In the clearest and most fluent vernacular Kim pointed out his error, climbed on to the box seat, and, perfect understanding established, drove for a couple of hours up and down, estimating, comparing, and enjoying [Lucknow] is the centre of all idleness, intrigue, and luxury, and shares with Delhi the claim to talk the only pure Urdu.

'A fair city—a beautiful city'. The driver, as a Lucknow man, was pleased with the compliment, and told Kim many astounding things where an English guide would have talked of the Mutiny. (120)

It is to Lucknow, the seat of pure Urdu, that Kim comes, when he is finally sent to school. His is a distinctly Orientalist education, aimed at the best possible governance of a country through an insider's knowledge of its language and culture. In this passage, we note that the Indian driver initially addresses Kim with the familiar form of *tum* (the 'thou' of the text) – a possible hint at the dubious status of white people in this city, which was the centre of the Indian Mutiny or Revolt of 1857. It is through the use of "the clearest and most fluent vernacular" that Kim establishes a good rapport with the driver, implying that the most effective way to interact with the natives is through the ability to enact a convincing native identity in linguistic performance. In this manner, he also gains a knowledge of the city that exceeds superficial Western understanding, otherwise limited to the stories that the driver knows a British person would want to hear about Lucknow, namely as the site for the Mutiny.

Colonialism utilized translation profusely in its cultural project; but oftentimes, the translation of a text took place even before the text was actually written in the original language. As Meenakshi Mukherjee remarks,

“the prose in which the early Indian novels came to be written was also shaped to some extent by European colonial enterprise”.²⁰ Competitions were held to encourage Indian writers to compose novels in the *bhasha* languages, so as to provide reading material for colonial officers in the Indian languages and as a form of ‘cultural translation’ of local customs. Thus the novel form itself can be seen as a form of postcolonial translation: a literary genre imported from nineteenth-century English literature, that would eventually incorporate narrative structures from Indian literature such as the oral tale, and that was to act as a linguistic palimpsest by showcasing cross-pollinations between *bhashas* and English, known in Indian literary studies as *bhasha sankar* (language mixture).

Translations of a source language into a host language imply a translation of the source language’s cultural values, and this was no less true for colonial British translators, who wished to gain, as well as disseminate, a knowledge of India by rendering its written literary and philosophical traditions accessible to a British public. By highlighting the complexity of Indian civilization through these texts, they were also hoping to persuade policy-makers back home that Orientalism was a viable way of administering the colony. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, British Orientalists undertook very selective translations of Indian texts, including a legal text translated into English as *A Code of Gentoo Laws or Ordinations of the Pundits* (1776), the *Bhagavad Gita* and the medieval Sanskrit play, *Shakuntalam*. “The Orientalist disregard for India’s present” meant that British scholars tended to translate only legal and spiritual works from Sanskrit. This lack of interest in contemporary literary production, argues Kothari, led to a certain conceptualization of India as other-worldly and characterized by a “universal mysticism”.²¹

Colonialism also used translation to disseminate its British cultural and civilizational values, and Homi Bhabha’s “colonial mimicry” is an imperfect translation of Englishness that becomes a subversion of the colonial norm, the idea that to be Anglicized is precisely *not* to be English. But while translation was being used by the British to communicate a civilizing discourse, at the same time it also became a key tool for the emergence of a multicultural idea of India during the nationalist movement. At stake was also the issue of ‘translating’ the principles behind the Indian nationalist movement into an appropriate idiom that was rooted in the *bhasha* languages and that could convey its message effectively to a sympathetic international public opinion. Javed Majeed, in his recent book on the autobiographies of the three great nationalist thinkers Gandhi, Nehru and Iqbal, notes how Gandhi’s search for the term *satyagraha* “was initially motivated by the project to find an Indian substitute for the English term ‘passive resistance’”.²² However, by coining this term, both he and his followers soon stopped using the term ‘passive resistance’, even in English

²⁰ Meenakshi Mukherjee, *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985; 2nd edn 1994), 19.

²¹ Kothari, *Translating India*, 16.

²² Javed Majeed, *Autobiography, Travel, and Postnational Identity: Gandhi, Nehru and Iqbal* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 259.

translations of Gandhi's works such as the celebrated nationalist tract *Hind Swaraj* (1910), and only used the Indian term. Thus *satyagraha*, argues Majeed, "is not a stable meaning fixed in a system of translation; instead it enacts a productivity of meaning which is released by the precariousness of translation itself, reversing the original terms of the translation ... The name *satyagraha* is always and already a term in translation, held together by translation and constituted through translation, while simultaneously being an original term".²³

²³ Ibid.

Translation emerges as a fundamental process for the dissemination of colonial and subsequently, anti-colonial ideas in the South Asian context. One of the basic premises of our project is that most Indian writers today operate in a situation of multi-lingualism; their literary language can be described as a syncretic co-existence of linguistic influences, often presenting itself as a form of 'translation' from an original that has never existed in its complete form, but of which traces remain in the text. Indian writers in English, argues GJV Prasad, deploy strategies to make their texts read like translations from *bhashas*.²⁴ The obvious case in point is the novel *Kanthapura* (1938) by Raja Rao, written, quite significantly, 'before' Indian independence and moulding its English onto the syntactic structure and lexical influence of Kannada. Indian bilingual authors incorporate translation into the practice of writing itself, and in some sense collapse the two professions, that of translator and author, into one. An author can find herself thinking in ways that cannot be contained within a single language, whereas linguistic chauvinism tends to restrict speakers, and thus writers, to the use of a single language. Thus we can begin to understand how translation – both as a concept and as a process – is at the heart of a possible 'theory' of South Asian literature today that spans its diverse language-literatures.

The critic Aijaz Ahmad, in a famous 1992 essay, asked whether an Indian literature actually exists, and he deliberately placed the term in inverted commas, as if to emphasize its status as an 'idealistic' construction.²⁵ For this reason, rather than attempts at generalization, the most illuminating approach to an understanding of Indian literature as a coherent entity is the comparatist one; a comparison across discrete language-literatures to map common trends, mutual influences, crossover genres. Today, contemporary Indian literature presents a fragmented picture because of its linguistic differences across the country. At the same time, however, we are witnessing the development of a pluralistic literary scenario, that draws on the presence of multiple literary histories and traditions, as well as the emergence of new genres. What is most striking about contemporary production is its language mixture; Indian languages cross-pollinate each other, and literary texts bear evidence of the frequent code-mixing and code-switching that characterizes Indian linguistic usage. Thus Malayalam

²⁴ GJV Prasad, "Writing Translation: The Strange Case of the Indian English Novel", in Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi, eds., *Postcolonial Translation: Theory and Practice* (London: Routledge, 1999), 41-57.

²⁵ Aijaz Ahmad, "'Indian Literature': Notes Towards the Definition of a Category", in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992), 243-286.

and Tamil, both spoken in Southern India, influence each other, and the traces of this 'collaboration' are present in contemporary works in each of these two languages. Similarly, more and more works are being produced in 'Hinglish', the hybrid Hindi-English idiom spoken by many urban Indians today.

What has emerged so far out of the discussions during the workshops organized by the network, was a sense of the growing importance of translation both in the theory and the practice of literature in contemporary South Asia. Kothari has identified 20 or so Indian institutions of higher education that offer courses and degrees in translation.²⁶

²⁶ Kothari, *Translating India*, 37-38.

What also emerged out of the network discussions was a clear sense that translation is not only happening into English. 'Horizontal' translation, namely that between different Indian *bhashas*, has gained a new purchase in the past ten or fifteen years. Malayalam is, after English, the major source-language for translations in India. Sage Publications, an Indian academic publisher, has launched a wildly successful translation project that translates Anglophone academic texts into Indian languages. Sold at tobacco-stalls and train stations, these books, priced significantly lower than their English originals, garner excellent sales. Translation between Indian languages has also helped Dalit writers form a sense of literary community across languages, such as Tamil and Hindi, two major vehicles of literary expressions for this politically and socially marginalized group. Many translators contributed significantly to our discussions, explaining how their activity is often related to ideological positions, and almost always reveals a 'philosophy' of some sort behind it. The critic and translator Mangalam, who works with Tamil, outlined the distinction between 'academicist' translations, that tend to occur into English, and 'activist' translations, that take place, for example, from Tamil into Hindi, and which she argues have a stronger social and political impact. Though translation into English gives greater visibility and financial rewards, horizontal translation has a huge ideological importance. For example, in the case of Dalit literature, thanks to translation we are witnessing the development of a multi-lingual corpus of writing that presents itself as an alternative to a literary system premised on a normative idea of nation. Translation establishes a dialogue between a Tamil Dalit writer and a Hindi Dalit writer, who can thus discover common concerns and issues. Dalit literature can be understood as a form of 'resistance' literature, where writing is often mobilized for activist and political purposes, to raise awareness of the dire socio-economic conditions of Dalits living in India today, and this cuts across languages.

The publishing workshop held in Delhi with a number of prominent publishers and editors, revealed the very interesting and diverse approaches to translation among Indian publishers today. From what the participants

²⁷ Report on Publishing Workshop, *Postcolonial Translation: The Case of South Asia*, <http://www.postcolonialtranslation.net/workshop_reports.php>, 20 June 2009.

said, it was clear that while English language publishing dominates the production of books, there is a substantial readership for texts in *bhasha* languages, and for English-language literature in translation, while there is a real need to build up the market for translations from *bhasha* languages into English.²⁷ More than one participant remarked that big publishers need to take more risks with publishing translations; ironically, it is usually the small publishing houses who go out on a limb and specialize in translations. All participants agreed that it was difficult to market translations and to create an audience for them, because readers tended to prefer texts originally written in English. Another very interesting phenomenon was the rapid rate of increase of the internal market for Indian fiction in English. It is no longer seen as a genre that is 'produced' merely for the West, a proof of this being the fact that Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* sold 80,000 copies in India alone, between October 2008 and January 2009, after winning the Booker Prize. The number of sales is unprecedented in India for a novel in English (and a first novel at that). The book was being sold in every possible location in addition to the more obvious venues such as bookstores: at newsstands, in small shops in remote parts of the country, at traffic intersections. A parallel development was the growth of South Asian popular fiction, a homegrown genre literature in English, such as 'chicklit', children's literature, and detective fiction. Anuja Chauhan's wildly successful novel *The Zoya Factor* (2008), published by HarperCollins India, displays a language that has come a long way from any self-consciousness about English as an imported or alien language. It is a blithely confident and brilliantly humorous blend of Hindi and English, 'Hinglish', the code-mixed language spoken by many urban Indians. The language of the novel establishes its audience as young and decidedly South Asian, and is characterized by pop culture references to Bollywood stars such as Sharrukh Khan and to jingles for television commercials (Chauhan works for an ad agency). The hybridized language of advertising is an evident template for Chauhan's entertaining and fast-paced Indian English narrative. This is simply not fiction 'written for the West', because it is not easily translatable for a metropolitan Anglophone audience. Moreover, any attempt to translate this text into another language would pose significant challenges, because for all practical purposes, it is written in two languages, English and Hindi; reading requires a bilingual sensibility that the author takes for granted among her implied audience. See for example this passage from the novel, where the heroine Zoya, a junior advertising executive, is attempting to reach the venue of a film shoot which will feature the Bollywood actor Sharrukh Khan:

Anyway, she said I looked nice and made some cheapie remark about how I'd duded up to meet movie stars. I beamed like a besharam and shamelessly

admitted that I had as we stepped out jauntily into the dripping world, hailed a cab and told the driver to take us to Ballard Pier.

“*Wahan barrier laga hai*, shooting *chaalu hai*,” he said dourly and I got major thrills out of replying, “*Pata hai*, it’s *our* shooting only!”²⁸

²⁸ Anuja Chauhan, *The Zoya Factor* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2008), 5.

The dialogue is in Hindi to approximate the representation of the cab driver’s speech in the written narrative, and presumes the reader’s perfect understanding and acceptance of the seamless switch from English into Hindi, albeit interspersed with English words. A rough translation of the dialogue would be: “There is a barrier there, a [film] shooting is going on”, to which Zoya replies, “I know, we’re the ones doing the shooting!”. In attempting to convey the meaning of this exchange to a Western reader, one must not only translate the actual Hindi words, but also render the Indian English of the text accessible. In “it’s *our* shooting only”, the “only” is a typically Indian English expression, which seeks to emphasize the fact that the film shoot is being organized by Zoya’s ad agency, and thus constitutes a matter of pride for her—she can’t resist showing off a little to the cab driver. This passage demonstrates how difficult it is to pinpoint what a ‘translation’ actually consists of in the South Asian context: is it an “authorized” translation, namely the translation of existing *bhasha* language texts or expressions, or a “compositional” translation, namely versions of indigenous originals that do not exist?²⁹ Or, as is more likely, a bit of both? In other words, distinguishing linguistic from cultural translation makes little sense in contemporary South Asian writing.

²⁹ These helpful terms are coined by Moradewun Adejunmobi with reference to African literature in English and in translation from indigenous languages; see his essay “Translation and Postcolonial Identity”.

One of the major difficulties faced by publishers when contemplating the production of translations from the *bhashas* has to do with marketing. A translated text is not a first-hand product, and so it is hard to sell. Also, few people in this notoriously unpredictable industry like to take risks; they prefer to publish writers who are well-known and well-established in this or that language. One editor, VK Karthika at HarperCollins, suggested there should be more marketing of the original language writer in the case of translations; alternatively, works in translation could and should be marketed as simply ‘stories’.

But the question is: what is the right sort of marketing for a translated text? In terms of readership, translated texts tend to sell two to three thousand copies on average, and so there is no guarantee of immediate returns. As for translation into *bhasha* languages, another important task ahead is to build a library of good international fiction and translate it into Hindi, for example; but this is a long-term investment, which not many publishers would be willing to take on. The fact of the matter is that there are not many immediately bestselling translations, unless the translator herself is well known, as is the case with Baby Halder’s autobiography *A Life Less Ordinary* (2006), originally written in Bengali, subsequently translated in Hindi, and then translated into English by the well-known

³⁰ Baby Halder's case was a publishing phenomenon and made international headlines. See Amelia Gentleman, "A Maid Becomes an Unlikely Literary Star", *The New York Times* (2 August 2006), <<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/02/books/02maid.html>>, 20 June 2009.

publisher and feminist writer, Urvashi Butalia. Even then, the success of this book was partly due to the unusual circumstances of its writing: the author was an uneducated domestic worker who had been encouraged by her employer to put pen to paper and write the story of her life.³⁰ The issue of the (in)visibility of the translator is felt keenly by contemporary Indian publishers, and as the quality of translations improves, so does the prominence of the translator; Katha, for example, places the name of the translator on the covers of its books.

Thus, through the discussions of the workshop, a varied picture of the publishing sector emerged. It was unusual to hear that academic publishing has such a vibrant market in the *bhasha* languages, due to its reduced sales price and to its availability in unconventional venues such as tobacco-stalls and roadside stands. It was interesting to see the growth, in the short space of a very few years, of a robust internal market for Indian fiction in English, which had meant the rapid development of genre literature such as chicklit, with immediate crossovers into film. The editors all agreed that marketing literature in English translation was a risky business, and that it deserved more investment on the part of big mainstream publishers. However, what also emerged was that the market for translation 'into' *bhasha* languages 'from' English is very healthy, and growing day by day.