

Litinfinitive Journal
Vol-6, Issue-2 | 2nd December, 2024
Content

	Article Title	Authors	Pagination
	Content		
	Editorial	Sreetanwi Chakraborty	i-ii
1	Decoding the Song <i>Agar Tum Saath Ho</i> From <i>*Tamasha</i> : A Layered Analysis to Understand Narratives Beyond the Lyrics	Abhirup Bhadra	1-9
2	At Par with Original - The Politics of Translation in Shyam Selvadurai's <i>many roads through paradise</i>	Dr. Nabanita Sengupta	10-18
3	As the Text Speaks: The Repressed Returns in Achebe's <i>No Longer at Ease</i>	Dr. Oindrila Bhattacharya	19-24
4	Lakshmi, Bounty and Cultural Deification: A Review of <i>Treasures of Lakshmi - The Goddess who Gives</i> by Namita Gokhale and Malashri Lal	Sreetanwi Chakraborty	25-27

Editorial

Sreetanwi Chakraborty

Chief-Editor- Litinfinitive Journal

Assistant Professor, Amity Institute of English Studies and Research

Amity University Kolkata. West Bengal, India.

Mail ID: litinfinitivejournal@gmail.com | ORCID ID: [0000-0002-2936-222X](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2936-222X)

Identity is an elusive self. The constant conflict between the self and the other translated into various resourceful paradigms are constantly changed, forged, translated, narrated within and without the borders of diversity. The creation and erasure of identity across a cultural paradigm, a geographical space and a category of time never remains constant. Like the shadowed lines, lines of the memory, language and social contradictions make way for an individual to consolidate the paradigms of identity, and the changing notions of selfhood. In fact, identities are brittle in several aspects, as Lisbeth Littrup points out in the book *Identity in Asian Literature*

“Since the Second World War, new, independent states have emerged and Asian ‘post-colonial’ writers have searched to define an ‘identity of their own’ or ‘national identity’, analysing both the colonial past as well as their own cultural past.” (Littrup 5)

It is true that the combined effect of migrating from one place to another and struggling with various identities have changed a lot after the two global wars. Whether in films or in literature, the dislocation of a singular identity is a common phenomenon that we encounter in several segments of literature. In the current issue of Litinfinitive Journal, we have research papers that range from decoding Bollywood songs and films to the politics of translation in Shyam Selvadurai’s edited book *many roads through paradise*, to interrogating how the text speaks and the repressed returns in Chinua Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease*, the papers aim at fresh, new insights into pluralistic identity by interrogating spaces, language, borders, geographical locations, emotions and the cultural stereotypes. Abhirup Bhadra’s paper on a song from the Bollywood film *Tamasha* aims at a nuanced, significant understanding of the song beyond the lyrics. He tries to locate the complexities of affective communication, gender, action and agency in commenting what the song does, in not being just a popular song altogether. Nabanita Sengupta’s paper titled *At Par with Original – The Politics of Translation in Shyam Selvadurai’s many roads through paradise* is an attempt to look at Selvadurai’s edited volume in understanding Sri Lankan literature and the role of language and power in delineating the cultural matrix of Sri Lanka. There is power politics, and a polyphonic representation of several characters and themes that give a newer and wiser dimension to understand Sri Lankan literature to the core. Oindrila Bhattacharya’s paper scrutinizes in how many ways and with possible consequences the repressed returns in Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease*. She dives deeper into conversion to the Christianity and the problematics of the self and identity in upholding the indigeneity of a native place. Finally, the current issue of Litinfinitive contains a review of *Treasures of Lakshmi – The Goddess who Gives* by Namita Gokhale and Malashri Lal. The book has multiple segments in which it discusses the cultural aspects of Lakshmi, the folk tales of India and the revered space in which Lakshmi

is kept in the heart of millions. The insightful chapters in this book elaborates Lakshmi as an all-encompassing potent force that nurtures and gives. Additionally, the book is also a repository of personal experiences of Lakshmi puja in the home of some of the authors.

I hope our readers, scholars, researchers and faculty will derive the necessary academic nourishment from Litinfinitive Vol. 6, Issue 2.

I express my heartfelt thanks to all our esteemed editors and contributors.

I offer my sincerest thanks to Penprints Publication, for their constant technical support.

Thanking You,
Sreetanwi Chakraborty
Editor-in-Chief
Litinfinitive Journal
Kolkata

References

Littrup, Lisbeth. *Identity in Asian Literature*. Routledge, 2013.

Decoding the Song *Agar Tum Saath Ho* From *Tamasha*: A Layered Analysis to Understand Narratives Beyond the Lyrics

Abhirup Bhadra

Doctoral Research scholar, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Arka Jain University, Jamshedpur, Jharkhand, India.

Mail id: abhirupbhadra0@gmail.com | Orcid - [0000-0002-2977-4769](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2977-4769)

Abstract

Bollywood songs usually have multi-layered narratives that hit the audience at different levels. *Agar Tum Saath Ho* from *Tamasha* is a very poignant expression of turbulence in relationships. This paper attempts to understand the song *Agar Tum Saath Ho* through content analysis of explicit meaning and the subtext carried in its lyrics, visuals, and music. It will demonstrate how the song speaks about some of the themes on love and emotional disconnection in subtle analysis which gives this study a more detailed take on the movie and its role in the cinematic narrative arc.

Keywords: *Agar Tum Saath Ho, Bollywood, Emotional dynamics, Content analysis, Narrative significance*

Introduction

Bollywood, the largest film industry in India, has been playing a very pivotal role in the formation of the cultural identity of its audience. Among its defining features, music stands out not only as entertainment but also as a medium for storytelling and conveying deeper socio-cultural and emotional narratives. Bollywood songs often serve as a mirror reflecting societal norms, individual struggles, and collective aspirations. They create layers of meaning by means of skilfully designed lyrics and melodies, telling a story of themes such as love, loss, resistance, and identity (Choudhury 2016).

The evolution of Bollywood music has a lot to do with India's socio-political landscape. Traditionally, Bollywood songs have been the offshoot of Indian classical music and gradually have assimilated many elements of Western genres, such as jazz, rock, and pop, as the industry gradually became responsive to global trends (Choudhury et al., 2013). For example, changes in the audience's taste and in the production technologies from soulful romantic melodies of the golden era of Hindi cinema to experimental, genre-blending tracks of contemporary Bollywood reflect changes in audience preferences and production technologies (Rehman 2016). Recent research highlights how Bollywood music acts as a cultural ambassador, promoting cross-cultural interactions through the blending of Indian tunes with Western musical expressions. This fusion not only increases its global appeal but also acts as a platform to express and comment on social issues (Sarrazin 2008). Interestingly, the subtle underlying messages in

Bollywood songs generally question the societal status quo or give voice to the ignored voices and hence provide a fertile ground for scholarship (Sarrazin 2008).

This research attempts to unpack the latent narratives in Bollywood songs and analyse their role in shaping societal perceptions and individual emotions. By decoding lyrical themes, musical styles, and cultural contexts, the study will reveal how these songs go beyond entertainment value to become powerful tools of communication and cultural expression. Bollywood songs have been the tool for narration for many years and have gone beyond being mere entertainment to be powerful vehicles of communication for subtle emotional and social messages. Such songs normally carry deeper meanings with the theme being relatable to most cultures, personal lives, and the plight of society. While focusing on love and heartbreak or existential musing, as well as social justice issues, Bollywood music generally consists of multiple layers of meaning beyond what the words reveal about the characters' psyches and the general setting of the narrative (Prakash 2021).

For example, 'Agar Tum Saath Ho' in the movie *Tamasha*'s lyrics express existential pain, vulnerabilities of the heart, and transformation power through love. The song deals in two layers of reflection about friendship and deeper exploration within rigid social norms about identification and emotional healing (ExplainedLyrics 2024). This kind of dual-layered narration is characteristic of Bollywood cinema, where music is an expression of unspoken words and inner conflicts. In addition, Bollywood songs have always incorporated social and political issues with a subtle message in them that would encourage awareness or a challenge to the existing norm. This ability of entertaining while also carrying some deeper meaning reflects the cultural relevance of the industry, hence, making songs a reflection of reality in society (DoverAnalyst 2023). Therefore, by examining Bollywood songs, researchers can find ways through which music acts both as a cultural artifact and a tool for shaping the collective consciousness. Bollywood has an unmatched tradition of infusing complex emotional stories within its song. Songs sometimes have been an expression of a character's inner world or a relationship and are not confined only to entertaining. Agar Tum Saath Ho is such a song which can depict how fragile the emotions of a human heart could be-the struggle between letting go and holding on. This research will deconstruct the song in two levels: general understanding of its literal meaning and deeper analysis of its emotional layers.

Research Objectives

1. To understand the subtle themes, emotions and other narratives conveyed in the song *Agar Tum Saath Ho*.
2. To uncover the underlying subtext in the song's lyrics, music, and visuals and try to find out the meaning of the song from the lens of human relationship and cognitive dissonance

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks are the spine of any study. To understand certain phenomenon, theories act as an aid. As this study puts light of film studies and human behaviour and psychology, certain theories become important for the researcher to discuss-

- **Theories of Dual Process for emotional regulation-** In dual-process theories of emotion regulation, emotional responses are controlled by two inter-related systems:

Automatic (Implicit) System: It is rapid, unconscious, and intuitive. It operates with deep emotional impulses and reactions that generally bypass deliberate thought. Thus, a person crying involuntarily in response to heartbreak represents this system. This kind of emotional expressions are often sudden and showcases inbuilt nature of human beings, for example people who cannot handle death, see blood, people who are emotionally softer than people who have greater control on their emotions.

Controlled (Explicit) System: This is the conscious, deliberate processes for the control or suppression of emotions. This is what makes humans have control over their emotional responses in line with the requirements of society or the attainment of their personal goals. An example is masked pain and a composed public behaviour.

Important Takeaways: These often work together at the same time, but they also conflict when dealing with the many emotions associated with such disorder. In this case, a person may have strong feelings (automatic), but they may also try to control or rationalize them.

The psychological states and social interactions can depend on the type of approach used to suppress, re-evaluate, or release emotional regulation.

Uses in Cinema: In order to be able to show real emotional battles, these two processes are personified by characters within movies. Dramatic emotional dissonance is experienced when, for instance, Ved's controlled suppression is explicit, and Tara's emotional expression is unrestrained and automatic in Agar Tum Saath Ho.

- **Narrative Communication Theory-** This theory analyses how narratives in any form, whether stories, movies, or other narrative forms, communicate messages, emotions, and values. It is based on the fact that by nature, human beings are storytellers and stories form and influence actions.

- **Key Principles:**

Narrative Structure: Stories contain elements such as plot, characters, and conflict that will provoke meaning and emotions.

Emotional Transportation: The audience gets transported into the story where one empathizes with the characters and their situations.

Cultural Context: Often, the stories reveal and perpetuate the cultural norms and ideologies or criticisms, hence making them a vehicle for societal comment.

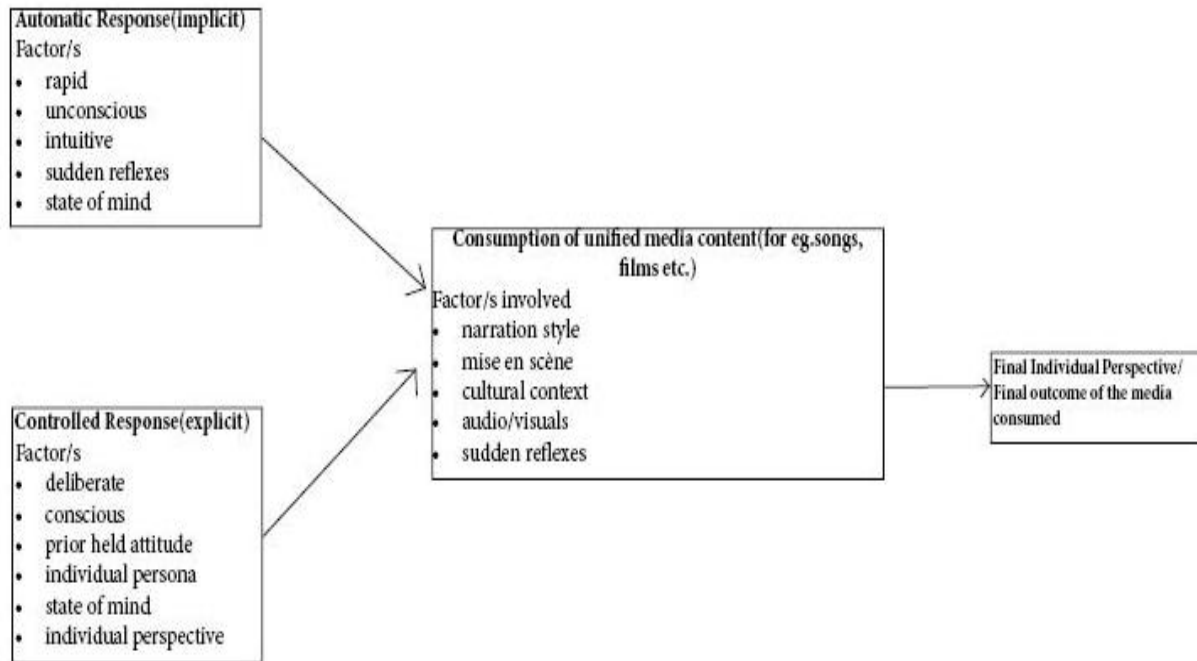
Identification and Connection: The character and circumstances with which they can identify and find themselves in the plot.

Application in Cinema: The break-up scene and the song Agar Tum Saath Ho accompanying it in Tamasha are designed to express pain at separation and turmoil inside. The narrative of the scene is able to engage the viewers emotionally while at the

same time giving a commentary on contemporary relationships and identity struggles through the use of music, acting, and setting.

According to Narrative Communication Theory, this scene can be viewed as a means of inciting emotional engagement in order to get viewers to relate with their own experiences.

Conceptual Framework



The above diagram is author’s own creation made using Adobe InDesign, drawing conclusion from the theoretical concepts, which helps the readers to visualize and examine how humans form different perspective consuming the same content.

Methodology

For this study the song Agar Tum Sath Ho composed by infamous A.R. Rahman and voiced by Alka Yagnik and Arijit Singh released in October 9th 2015 from the film Tamasha directed and written by Imtiaz Ali and produced by Sajid Nadiadwala in year 2015([link](#)) was selected based on the readings of above theories, which seeded the idea to see those theories through a song. This song upholds many narrative explanations which was tested in a form of a verbal pilot study among Ph.D. scholars and independent film makers to get an overall general understanding of what perspective they have, what they think of the lighting set-up. The final discussions are segregated in two parts, first the general outcome of the song and second author’s own perception to understand the narratives beyond the lyrics from the lens of theoretical framework mentioned later in the paper. By getting various opinions and perspective from a single unified content, the motivation to investigate the content further raised.

Focussing on content analysis, the following tools were used further to understand the song-

- *Analysis of Texts*- To understand the repetitive themes, metaphors, and emotional undertones.
- *Visual Analysis*- Decoding the visual aids would help me understand the connotations of body language, mise-en-scène and character expressions.
- *Analysis of Music*-Alka Yagnik and Arijit Singh's rendition and A.R. Rahman's composition were decoded to illustrate how the musical elements are intertwined to build the story.
- *Analysis in Context*- To determine the value of the song, its placement in the movie's storyline and its connection to the character's arcs were analysed.

General Findings and Discussion of themes

Understanding the Overt Emotional Conflict

The lyrics candidly show a plea for reconciliation wherein Tara (Deepika Padukone) wants to be connected, and Ved's (Ranbir Kapoor) internal conflict cannot allow that. The visuals amplify this with Tara being fragile and Ved not able to return fully. General sense is that the song becomes a sad dialogue between two who try to find solace in their love's complexities.

Subtext and Symbolism- Between the Lines

Lyrics- The song title *Agar tum saath ho* signifies more than just a plea for companionship – they reflect Tara's hope to heal Ved's fractured self-identity. The entire song is crafted in way where there is a constant tussle between Ved and Tara. The observation of the lyrics from a first-hand point of view gives a hint of harshness and being rude towards partner in the lines *Tum saath ho ya na ho, kya farq hai? Bedard thi zindagi, bedard hai*- the lines convey a blunt statement to be told to a partner, but which is not that is conveyed in later part of this section.

Visuals- There is an immense war within the relationship of the two conflicting characters: Tara's anchored serenity and Ved's turbulent movements. And whereas there is an enormous emotional war between the two protagonists, Ved portrays turmoil and identity confusion over himself, his existence, and the search for self through frantic movement and a failure to stand still. Moreover, it has a very potent symbolic quality because it catches in some way their emotional identities and the distance building between them.

The colours used during the scenes also bring to light this difference. Soft colours have been predominantly used in Tara's visuals, which suggests a calm and composed personality of Tara. The dusky and wavering lighting round Ved reflects uncertainty and turmoil in the emotions. It is a sober interplay, which underlines emotional tension and disconnection. Such deliberate use of cinematic techniques subtly yet powerfully shows their inability to find harmony, reinforcing the overarching theme of their emotional divergence.

Music- Tension created by the feeling of something long-awaited for and an acceptance of its loss takes on an audible dimension in this very sorrowful piano and sad, slow tempo. Ved's journey gets to bear a sense of deliberated composing so that each note had ample resonance

within the song to beget the unspoken pain and thought. The piano chords get a soft, yearningly melancholic quality but give hints of necessary acceptance into reality at the same time. This delicate dance between hope and despair nicely reflects Ved's character, which was defined by internal conflict.

This melodramatic storytelling is given wings by the sweet voice of Arijit and Alka Yagnik. His voices blend rawness and romance in an effortless transition from fragility to repression - an extremely charged Ved's heart. He tries to restrain his voice low so that introspection moments show Ved's frailty and desire for connection. Later, with time, he seems to maintain a constrained flow of speech, suggesting his attempt to suppress himself, control his composure. Melody and voice intermingling here evoke an experience that is actually engrossing and reflects a rather compassionate relationship in the hearts of the audience concerning the emotional conflict Ved feels. It's the two creativeness, Rahman's composition with Arijit Singh's nuanced delivery, that let the music become part of Ved's story and add even more emotional depth and resonance to the tale.

Investigating Narratives beyond the lyrics- The author's perception

The entire reason to dissect the song *Agar Tum Sath Ho* from the film *Tamasha* was to understand the narrative beyond the written lyrics. The study becomes very important from the aspect of understanding media context not in its original form but reading it beyond the superficial meaning. The narratives and its understanding are often not unified but rather very subjective in nature first due the nature of medium and contents, to which Stuart Halls argument suits that all messages have embedded meaning, are polysemic (can have multiple meaning) and ubiquitous in nature. Thus, dissecting media text particularly text which are articulated such as films, songs, documentaries etc. which are seeded from human brain may have underline meanings which are important for the readers to understand. These understandings make the readers aware of text loaded with propaganda or misinformation.

From the song([link](#)) it is very much understood that there is a constant tussle between the two characters Ved and Tara acted by Ranvir and Deepika. In the song Tara is dressed in red attire symbolising heart where in other hand Ved is attired with dress coloured in Biege symbolising the brain. From this interpretation the conversation of the song changes, from a normal sad love song to the conversation of heart and brain in an individual from the point of view of separation and pain. The two organs heart and brain have been connotated in a very beautiful way. The heart depicts love, emotion, feelings and pain whereas the brain supports practically, rational thinking which is often overlooked often when a human deals with matters related to love and feelings which caused a tussle between listening to heart or agreeing to the signals of brain resulting in cognitive dissonance. From 0.00 frame of the song to 0.27th frame- the heart (Tara) can be seen to stop the brain (Ved), requesting it to stop and listen to her. The brain says its again a compromise to me in a sarcastic way and pointing out the repetition of pain that the body undergoes.

Certain dialogues from the heart in the song says *Mai dhal jati hu teri adato mai, agar tum sath ho*, portrays the situation of heart when the brain signals for a Dopamine release and gets attached to the person. Similarly, the brain says- "Mujhe lagta hai hai ki baatein dil ki hoti lafzon ki

dhokebazzi, tum sath ho ya naho kya fark hai, bedard thi jindagi, bedard hai.” It portrays the rationality of the brain as often the sound of heart is blind and it accepts people very easily without much of rational thinking which sometimes result in landing to pain and separation, contradicting the brains function which thinks logically before considering a person. Thus, when a person falls in love or initiates feelings for someone there are two voices from within which we often encounter one from the heart which easily melts, gives multiple chances, compromises, adjusts itself and tries very hard to retain the person with them because heart often makes a habit for that person. The heart- *Pal-bhar theher jaaao, dil ye sambhal jaaye, Kaise tumhein roka karoon?, Meri taraf aata har gham phisal jaaye, Aankhon mein tumko bharon, Bin bole baatein tumse karoon,* states how the heart urges the brain to stop for just one last time and listen and how can I stop you as we both have to take a joint decision. The brain - *Teri nazron mein hain tere sapne, Tere sapnon mein hai naraazi, Mujhe lagta hai ke baatein dil ki, Hoti lafzon ki dhokebaazi, Tum saath ho ya na ho, kya fark hai?, Bedard thi zindagi, bedard hai,* says that no every time it’s the same story over and over again, you get attached without listening to me and force the person to say every possible word that will make the other person stay even when it’s a situation of compromise. The brain tells the heart that without it, life was without pain, and I think that is better rather being into a relationship where everyday is full of pain.

The brain (Ved) leaves the heart and goes sway and the heart starts to chase and final at frame 3.10 Tara (heart) finds the Ved(brain) in a corner of the street alone waiting for her. This symbolises a very important message for us who deals with emotional pain in a relationship and often ignores the signals of the brain, but at last we as a human being need to understand that every relationship and every human being is different with his/her own emotional acceptance and tolerance.

Conclusion

Through its agonizingly beautiful music, *Agar Tum Saath Ho* from the movie *Tamasha*, goes on to explore life beyond shores, into the twisted and tangled emotional convolutions of the otherwise merely narrated human relationships. It is more than just a sequence in the movie. It becomes a very convincing argument of the illusion for love, heartbreaks, and all the emotional dilemmas that such an act would cast shadows upon. Very weighty lyrics, seductive visuals, and soul-stirring music by the penman of wonders, A.R. Rahman, all help to condense this song into *Tamasha* itself: identity, love, and self-discovery.

The major scene that captures the very essence of relationships-misery in unfulfilled love and that emotional anomaly, which people come to know with crossroads of relationships, is this: between Tara and Ved. This is also a very important lesson against the emotional grapevine of the relationships. Mostly people do not listen to their heads because they are intoxicated by the yearnings of their hearts. This tells us that every relationship and person is different; some accept emotions, others have a tolerance where they might not. An eye on oneself and others is the introspection it provokes, suggesting that mutual respect and emotional balance be developed. In fact, *Agar Tum Saath Ho* also provides a narrative meaning to the film, and it is itself an effective apparatus for making an emotional appeal to the internalized audience. With his melancholy-ridden tune and heart-wrenching lyrics, it strikes a universal chord in the hearts of the listeners, as it allows them to insert fill in their own love and loss experiences, hence

turning the song into a healing-transformational space. It makes people view their emotional journey again in the complexities of love: but love can be bittersweet in that sense.

The song "Agar Tum Saath Ho" serves as the emotionally climactic scene of Tamasha wherein Ved tries to grapple between his true desire as such and what is expected from him by society. Such a poignant moment does not just expose Ved's inner self but puts Tara to the role of a reflective mirror that tries to capture all struggles he faces. The story has very craftily intertwined such emotions where Tara's heart is broken which acts as a trigger for the transformation of Ved. Her pain is more than merely individual suffering as it also acts as a piercing trigger forcing Ved to face his suppressed identity. Thus, the song becomes that turning point which bridges the internal conflict of Ved and his final journey toward self-realization.

At a broader level, the themes trying to be explored here are almost hauntingly close to the universal human experiences. The first and perhaps the most important theme of this sequence is identity and love, and it is very much tied up in the fabric of the song. It talks about the need for romantic longing, while at the same time carrying an undercurrent about the impossibility of the wholeness of fulfilment through another person. Ved's journey firmly fixes the understanding that self-discovery and personal growth are the prerequisites for any kind of meaningful relationship. Tara herself, in his case, is quite real and deep in her love for Ved, but that cannot supplement his failure to accept his identity. The conflict-natured tension between such external love and internal conflict is what makes this song so emotionally pour-it-towards-the-cesspool-of-such-depression. The latter half of the song very beautifully stresses the importance for men to define their own purposes and identities rather than seek validation only from others. The song thus poignantly captures one another's theme between estranged emotions and distance. Ved and Tara share the same physical closeness but have never experienced real emotional connection. This song strikingly summarizes that a close physical distance does not mean that there is a kind of emotional bridge that ties two people together. A deeper sense of connection, intimacy, romance, and so forth must be there. Although this song has caught a lot of beautiful imagery and phrases, it leaves very little space for imagination. It is such a song that has an impact on all the shades of love. In other words, this song has droughted the true emotional compass of love's heights and depths.

The loss of emotional disconnection is one such core theme that the song exhibits powerfully. Although Ved shared the same distance as Tara, the song idea implies that proximity cannot ensure emotional bonding. Nothing can replace the deep feeling of intimacy, sense of sharing, and time spent together- not even a promise or a sentiment. Although it is wrapped in gifts of beauty and phrases, it does not leave much to the imagination. The short, but very intense, song evokes all nuances of love-or rather, shades of love that have been denied to society. In other words, that particular song has plotted the real emotional compass from which love rises and falls into its depths. Everyone attaches a string to that song and listens to it really to feel and appreciate the subtexts hidden within the lyrics.

This, therefore, becomes yet another theme which is decoupled from emotions as clearly and strongly put by the song. Despite Ved and Tara sharing such physical distance, the theme thus suggests that proximity cannot ensure emotional bonding. This highlights the fact that nothing can take the place of the deep feeling of intimacy, sense of sharing, and time spent

together- not even a promise or a sentiment. Though wrapped in the gift of beauty and phrases, it does very little toward invoking imagination.

References

- Bordwell, David. *Narration in the Fiction Film*. Harvard University Press, 1985.
- Choudhury, S., et al. "The Evolution of Bollywood Music: Reflections of Culture and Global Influences." *International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Studies and Research*. IJAMSR Article.
- Rehman, M. "Bollywood's Reliance on Film Music as a Cultural and Global Phenomenon." *International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Studies and Research*. IJAMSR Article.
- Sardana, K. "Cultural Identity in Bollywood: A Reflection of Societal Values." *International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research*. IJAMSR Article.
- Sarrazin, Natalie. "Celluloid Love Songs: Musical Modus Operandi and the Dramatic Aesthetics of Romantic Hindi Film." *Popular Music*, vol. 27, no. 3, Oct. 2008, pp. 393–411, doi:10.1017/s0261143008102197.
- Schoebi, Dominik, and Ashley K. Randall. "Emotional Dynamics in Intimate Relationships." *Emotion Review*, vol. 7, no. 4, July 2015, pp. 342–48, doi:10.1177/1754073915590620.

Secondary sources

- *Musical composition analysis*. 2013.
- *Tamasha*. 2015.
- T-Series. "'Agar Tum Saath Ho' Full Video Song | Tamasha | Ranbir Kapoor, Deepika Padukone | T-Series." *YouTube*, 9 Dec. 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRb8hwxN5zc.

At Par with Original – The Politics of Translation in Shyam Selvadurai’s *many roads through paradise*

Dr. Nabanita Sengupta

Assistant Professor of English, Sarsuna College (affiliated to University of Calcutta)

Kolkata, West Bengal, India

Mail id: nabanita.sengupta@gmail.com | Orcid - [0000-0003-2024-7652](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2024-7652)

Abstract

The 2014 anthology of Sri Lankan literature, *many roads through paradise*, edited by Shyam Selvadurai, makes no distinction between Sri Lankan literature in English and literature in English translation. The edited anthology breaks through the conventional linguistic discrimination between translated and original work and creates a new kind of literary ecology by bringing together three strands of Sri Lankan literature – Sri Lankan literature in English, Sinhalese literature in English translation and Tamil literature in English translation, at par with each other. Mapping the period from 1970s to the 2014, this anthology uses translation as a tool to stitch through the fragmented literary world of Sri Lanka, giving it a coherent character while retaining its richness. It is an attempt to provide a holistic picture of Sri Lankan literature encompassing as much variety as possible. The paper seeks to read the anthology in a post postcolonial literary environment with Sri Lanka going through various phases of literary and cultural upheavals and look into the postcolonial politics of representing the marginal through translation. It also explores the role of English in the literary movements of Sri Lanka and how translation emerges as a tool for survival and communication, with special reference to this edited anthology.

Keywords: *Translation, Sri Lankan Literature, Translation Studies, Postcolonial Literature, Postcolonial*

Introduction

“The crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that post-colonial writing defines itself by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place”. (Pg 37, Ashcroft, et al)

In countries like India, Sri Lanka, and others, English carries the baggage of a postcolonial anxiety - it is a language that had once been the weapon of the colonial rulers to dominate over the subalterns but since then has fallen from the position of such an absolute power. As a result, the practitioners of English language and literature in these countries, at least in the early postcolonial period, have also been suspected of being more loyal to the colonial masters and guilty of neglecting the indigenous or the vernacular languages. Yet in recent times

English has also been used as a medium or postcolonial tool by the Empire to write back. As Ashcroft, et al says, “the appropriation and reconstitution of the language of the centre, the process of capturing and remoulding the language to new usages, marks a separation from the site of colonial privilege (37)”. This strategy of appropriation of the ruler’s language is an important landmark in postcolonial literature. Postcolonial authors writing in English, subvert the tool of the colonisers to raise their own concern and to give voice to the margins.

A similar politics of language can be identified even in the translation of vernacular texts into English in the later postcolonial period, as eventually discussed in the paper. In order to include the cultural connotations and socio-linguistic peculiarities of a vernacular text, the Queen’s English had to stretch itself beyond its conventional limitations. The result was foreignization of English language, to take the readers of the Target culture to the Source culture in the Venutian sense of the term, because translation also meant a translation of culture. These texts, with ‘English’ as their medium of expression challenged the “the notion of literary universality (Tiffin)” and create a strong counter discourse. The Target language is stretched beyond its existing boundaries to encompass newer roles and to chart unknown terrains. This widening of the role of a language to include the subaltern or the marginalized by translating texts from the colonies creates a hybridized world of resisting the colonial hegemony, making English, once the language of rulers, the language of postcolonial intervention.

Shyam Selvadurai’s anthology *many roads through paradise*, an anthology of Sri Lankan literature in English and English translation, fits perfectly into the above-mentioned categories of postcolonial resistances. Published in 2014, this anthology consists of sixty-one titles including poems, excerpts from novels and short fictions, covering a period from 1970s to 2014. Besides being a voice of postcolonial resistance, it defies certain other established modes of representation as well. The anthology, by placing the original literary works alongside translated pieces challenges the hegemony of the original over the translation. In a subtle but sure way it places the translator almost at par with the creative writer. This paper attempts to look at the anthology from the perspective of postcolonial translation studies as well as the politics of representation in translation particularly in multilingual communities like Sri Lanka.

***many roads through paradise* as a Work of Postcolonial Translation**

In a detailed introduction to the anthology, Selvadurai traces the trajectory of English language teaching and the use of English as a medium of literature in Sri Lanka. English came to this country, as it did in the other countries of the world - as a language of the colonizers. In a situation almost similar to India, English remained an important language of administration presiding over the local languages of Sinhalese and Tamil even after the colonial rulers had left. It became a key player in the language wars that the country faced. Though the country became independent in 1948, English remained the language of administration till 1956, when the parliament passed a bill to make Sinhala the sole official language, thereby giving steam to the ethnic rivalry between the Sinhalese and the Tamils that tore the country apart for almost 26 years.

One of the distinguishing features of the countries belonging to the Indian subcontinent is their multilingual nature. As Indra Nath Choudhuri observes, “the multilingualism of the entire third world is envisaged as problematic particularly when developmental culture is viewed from the perspective of the developed world” (25). He adds that, though these pluralities

in terms of languages, religions or races are considered to be factors causing 'fragmentation', they are actually more inclusive in nature, embracing a more holistic form of existence. But these diversities, particularly the linguistic ones, play a crucial role in the socio-linguistic, cultural and political environment of the country. While on the one hand it creates a polyphonic society that allows a multiplicity of voices and an inclusivity of existence, it also leads to several complexities - overt or subtle rivalries for domination between indigenous languages being one of them. The prime concerns that prominently feature in the linguistic relationships prevalent in these countries can be broadly categorized in two parts - firstly, as mentioned, the rivalry between the indigenous languages and secondly, the postcolonial anxiety regarding the problematic position of English in these societies. While the existence of several languages has fostered linguistic factionalism, the colonial past has also left a deep mistrust of English as a medium of either communication or literature. At the same time, English has continued to exist as one of the important modes of both communication and literature for at least certain sections of the society. In most of these erstwhile colonies English has been a language of elites from the colonial times and has gradually become a marker of certain social positions in an already graded society. In the postcolonial post globalized world, there has been a rise in the English-speaking section of the society all over the world, further empowering the language. Predominance of English as a language of commerce and communication is now also seen as a threat to the vernacular languages. Ironically, for the reasons just mentioned, translations in English also provide a wider readership platform to the works originally written in vernacular languages, helping them to spread farther. Digital revolution in this age of information requires a common language to overcome the territorial and linguistic limitations, a role that is being quite efficiently fulfilled by English. It's emergence as a 'vehicular language' that helps in correspondence across cultures or as a global lingua franca also means an increase in the number of English language readers. Hence a translation in English definitely helps in placing the regional text to a wider reading audience. All these make English occupy a dubious state of both a suspect and an aide in the postcolonial societies, a polarity that has remained unresolved. As Helen Tiffin says, "Post-colonial cultures are inevitably hybridised involving a dialectical relationship between European ontology and epistemology and the impulse to create or recreate independent local identity" (18). English fulfils the role here as the link to this irresolvable binary. While on the one hand, it is a language that has till now been the mouthpiece of the colonial rulers, it also dawns upon itself the mantle of speaking for the marginal.

In Sri Lanka too, a similar situation prevails. Though the country now follows a trilingual policy with Sinhalese and Tamil as official languages and English as the link language, there is a lot to achieve in terms of linguistic harmony. The ethnic rivalry in Sri Lanka is actually a linguistic rivalry between the two communities of Tamils and Sinhalese; and English, though a link language in Sri Lanka, remains a suspect for various reasons and comes with a colonial baggage which people are eager to both shake off as well as to embrace. This has led to a continuum of struggle between Tamil, Sinhalese and English languages. The wars of ethnicity and identity politics that has marred the life in this island country for a number of years, has also created upheavals in its literary world, leading ultimately to the development of three separate branches of literature in Tamil, Sinhalese and English.

According to Selvadurai, Sri Lanka's independence in 1948 did not immediately lead to any major development of literature in the vernacular languages. It was only from the 1950s that Tamil literature and Sinhalese literature began to take a proper shape. This was also the period

of moving away from the classical form to the more accepted and contemporary forms for both Sinhalese and Tamil literatures. Tamil additionally also had to free itself from the shadows of Indian Tamil literature and develop a literary tradition more rooted in Sri Lanka. A significant corpus of Sri Lankan literature in local languages of Tamil and Sinhalese developed around this period. Many of the authors writing in these two languages drew from Western literature in terms of structure and form. In terms of content, however, they remained local, incorporating the local subjects, landscapes, customs, tradition and concerns.

On the other hand, Sri Lankan English literature developed much later. As Selvadurai himself says, “it remained trapped in its colonial past” (xviii). Hence English-language writers were severely criticized for their lack of engagement with Sri Lankan culture, socio-political issues and surroundings in a significant way. To quote Selvadurai again, “it took the failed socialist youth insurrection of 1971, led by the Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) to finally begin to change English literature in a substantial way” (xviii). Contemporary Sri Lankan literature in English is rooted in the culture, politics and sociological concerns of that country, as will be visible from the pieces included in this anthology. It is now as much informed by Sri Lankan concerns as those written in Tamil or Sinhalese languages. All these three separate lines of literary developments led to the creation and existence of three enriching streams of Sri Lankan literature.

In this book, *many roads through paradise* Selvadurai brings together all three branches of Sri Lankan literature by including both original English literature and literature in English translation. English translations of Sinhalese and Tamil literary works help them reach a wider and global audience. Postcolonial translations are significant because they not only narrate the stories in the target language but also communicate the source language culture. The translations included here maintain a fine balance between readability and foreignization of the Target Language, communicating not just the Source Text but also the Source Culture to the Target Language readers. There is a liberal usage of vernacular words which are either explained within the text or at times left unexplained. In an almost Barthian sense of writerly texts, these unexplained vernacular words, force the Target Language readers to go to the Source Language. The presence of the vernacular vocabulary does not hamper the flow of the text or its understanding by the readers, but it does make the serious reader pause and ponder over a culturally untranslatable word or phrase and its significance. It is at these pauses that the postcolonial texts triumph over colonial superiority. It is through these unfamiliar terms that the margin communicates with not just the centre but also with other margins, because one needs to remember that the postcolonial translation is not just an attempt to write back to the centre, but also and very significantly, to establish communication with other peripheries. Translating indigenous literature in English becomes a medium to set up that dialogue.

In ‘Postcolonial Literatures and Counter Discourses’, Helen Tiffin says, “The processes of artistic and literary de-colonization have involved a radical dis/mantling of European codes and a post-colonial subversion and appropriation of the dominant European discourses” (17). English translations of vernacular literature from colonies in many ways move towards achieving the ‘artistic and literary de-colonization’ that Tiffin talks about. It creates a zone of hybridization, appropriating the language of the colonizer to make it a vehicle of expressing the colonized. Even in this post globalized world, where the Eurocentric hegemonies continue to

exist in several forms, these translations are one of the means to make the marginal visible and also to 'dis/mantle' the European codes of a homogenous world.

In the anthology *many roads through paradise*, readers come across two kinds of postcolonial translations, both challenging the limitations of the Target Language, requiring it to accommodate parts of the Source Culture. The translations of Sinhalese and Tamil literature in English are the direct works of translation that we find in the anthology. But, interestingly, even the original English pieces that have been included in the anthology are in many ways acts of translation. In an excerpt from *The Giniralla Conspiracy*, a novel by Nihal de Silva, titled as 'The Rag' (188-226) in this anthology, the author makes generous uses of Sinhalese sentences which are then translated into English in the next line. These sentences are mostly dialogues by characters which add a local feel to the text, differentiating it from an English text from any other part of the world. Introduction of certain local phrases also helps in stamping the text with an indigenous identity. Appropriating the Target Language by the liberal use of the vernaculars also helps in differentiating between the various forms of English(s) that has developed as a means of postcolonial resistance. To identify and differentiate between say Caribbean English, Sri Lankan English or Indian English, the use of the vernaculars play an important role. Such within the text translations, found liberally scattered across the pieces included in this anthology under consideration are also a common feature in the postcolonial English literature and therefore are tools used in shaping the identity of the text.

Even the translated pieces included in the anthology retain certain vernacular expressions, sentences or phrases, a foreignizing act in translation, once again, for the same purposes as discussed above. These phrases are at times untranslatable to carry the actual meaning in Target Language, or they add a flavour to the translated text. Whatever be the reason, such translations add to the corpus of English literature(s). Maria Tymoczko in one of her articles aptly finds similarities between the two genres, that is postcolonial fiction and translation by identifying certain grounds of similarities. "The ability to evoke two languages simultaneously" (149) which Tymoczko says, "achieve linguistic multivalence and polysemous communication, typically while maintaining a monolingual surface" (150) is a very important point of intersection between translated texts and postcolonial fiction. Selvadurai, by placing together both translations and original postcolonial writings from Sri Lanka within the same book, highlights this characteristic even more sharply.

Each piece of literature in the anthology presents a slice of Sri Lankan history, culture, politics and language to the Target Language readers and enriches the corpus of English literature(s). It becomes difficult to identify and separate the pieces as original or translated work unless mentioned by the editor due to their resemblance in terms of contexts, content and language. Language here does not reflect upon the personal style of the author but focuses upon the kind of hybridized English that has been used in most of these works. In terms of context too, the translated texts and the originals overlap, making it difficult to identify one from the other. While Ayathurai Santhan's 'The Whirlwind' (234-268), an excerpt from his English novel *The Whirlwind*, narrates the predicament of a group of villagers whose homes are under threat from the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), 'The American Girl' (311-322) by A. Muttulingam, translated from Tamil by Lakshmi Holmström is also marked by a search for one's home and belongingness in the foreign land of America. At the backdrop of both the works is the violence unleashed by the IPKF and the ethnic violence that had made many Sri Lankans

homeless or sent them to exile in foreign lands. It is significant to note that the concerns that mark all literature from Sri Lanka are irrespective of their original language and the translated pieces and the originals come together to create a gamut of what can be identified as Sri Lankan literature.

Bringing Creative Writer and Translator at Par / Politics of Representation

One unusual thing that immediately catches the readers' attention is the title of this anthology. The title, as opposed to the established convention, does not use any capital letters. *many roads through paradise* by its very name challenges the rule of capitalization prevalent in English but absent in any of the Sri Lankan and even Indian languages. As a deliberate strategy then, it assaults the self-asserting role that capitalization plays in any piece of writing and instead, brings everything at par in a continuous flow of words. Thus, at the very outset Selvadurai chooses to omit one of the basic rules of English grammar and brings it closer to that of the languages of his country. This postcolonial strategy of appropriation of the foreign language that the editor deliberately uses in this anthology is an important form of resistance or protest against the white, Eurocentric binaries.

Similarly, he also does away with the convention of separating translated literatures from the original works of fiction, presenting all the included pieces as representatives of the greater identity of Sri Lankan fiction. In pursuing this course of action, Selvadurai is also making a political statement. In a land fraught over linguistic identities, where ethnic wars over languages have marred the country for decades, he is attempting to unify three separate strands of Sri Lankan literature. He makes his perspective clear – “This anthology presents an opportunity to know a country and its various cultures in a holistic way by reading a multiplicity of literary voices. In a post-war situation, this anthology provides an opportunity to build bridges across the divided communities...” (xxv).

The anthology in English therefore has a particular task to accomplish. In a country ravaged by linguistic feuds, it is an attempt to bring the warring communities closer to each other by providing for a common platform for literary exchanges and facilitating a literary interaction. For any plurilingual country “the language can act as an important means for an individual identification, that is, people's access to their own cultural tradition and their distinctive religious and political representation. These arguments show how language is used for social, economic and political developments of different countries” (35 Wakkumbura). In a country like Sri Lanka, where two major sections are Sinhalese and Tamils, other linguistic communities comprising an almost negligible minority, language ethnicity has been the cause for a clash of identities. The linguistic or ethnic feuds maiming the Sri Lankan society have often been considered a result of faulty administrative decisions. English, that had long remained the language of administration, in spite of not being the language of any of the ethnic communities, and only much later replaced by Sinhala with an even later addition of Tamil, still enjoys the position of ‘link language’ in Sri Lanka. Selvadurai capitalizes on that role of English in Sri Lanka to make a bridge across all three dominantly used languages of Sri Lanka. It is only by using the translations of Sinhalese and Tamil literature alongside English writings of Sri Lanka that Selvadurai can hope to represent a proper cross section of what holistically Sri Lankan literature consists of. Translation therefore plays the role of a literary emissary that binds the solitary threads of literature of a nation together.

The history of English translation in Sri Lanka dates back to the early colonial period when the British rulers translated the colonial texts, a policy rigorously followed by them in most of the colonies as a part of their imperial mission and in keeping with their imperialist policies. But most of those translations, till the point of Sri Lanka's independence, can be viewed as "transliterated, a horse-shoe attempt at assigning words to phrases, cultural slangs and idioms, and concepts that do not exist in English language" (27, Karunakaran). Translation remained caught in 'transliteration' or at its best, became "a one-way process, with texts being translated into European languages for European consumption, rather than as a part of a reciprocal process of exchange" (4, Bassnett and Trivedi). It is only well into the twentieth century that there was a 'cultural turn' in the field of translation studies that gave predominance to the cultural translation of a text and made it a vehicle for representing the Source Culture to the Target Language readers. In Selvadurai's anthology, these translations are successful in communicating the Source Culture to the Target Language readers as closely as possible.

The translations included in the anthology therefore become the spokesperson for their respective literary and cultural heritage. But the anthology contributes much more to the field of Translation Studies. It does away with the concept of the superiority of the original text over translation. The anthology, as mentioned earlier, deliberately refrains from categorizing the pieces as original or translation. In a democratization of the role of the translators and in acknowledgement of their role in the development of literature, the editor of this anthology treats each piece of work for its literary merit only, and not on the basis of its original language of composition. Hence, an anthology of Sri Lankan literature boldly opens with two translated works - the first 'The Chariot and the Moon' (4-5) a poem composed by Mahakavi aka T. Rudramoorthy, the pioneer of modern Tamil poetry in Sri Lanka and translated by S. Pathmanathan; followed by 'The Mahagedara' (5-35), an excerpt from a Sinhalese novel by Martin Wickramasinghe and translated jointly Lakshmi de Silva and Ranga Wickramasinghe. The third work that we come across in the anthology is an excerpt from a memoir in English 'Our Valavu' from *The Yaal Players: Memories of Old Jaffna*, written by Vimala Ganeshanathan. So, the tone is set right from the beginning - the anthology successfully introduces three diverse branches of Sri Lankan literature. As the anthology proceeds, readers realize that the inclusion of the pieces, whether translation or original, do not follow any fixed pattern of appearance. In the editor's own words, "to promote (the) ethos of unity, I have not, as many previous anthologies of Sri Lankan literature have done, divided the work by the three language streams. Instead, the work is grouped under four themes that are explained at the beginning of each section" (xxv). The Sri Lankans who have remained 'largely ignorant' of the 'thoughts, experiences, history and cultural mores of their fellow countrymen... due to linguistic divides" (xxv) can get an access to the rich heritage through such works. So, translation here also becomes an agency of promoting a unified national literary heritage. It promotes the noble intention of the editor to unify the segregated strands of Sri Lankan literature and bring them under a common platform. It also allows for a dialogue across cultures which has been disrupted due to years of feuds between them.

Such an anthology is also a remarkable achievement in terms of providing the required visibility to the translators. Until quite recently translation was at best recognized as an imitation of the original that required a linguistic fidelity to the original text. Translators remained second grade citizens in the literary world for a long time, a stigma even now not completely erased. Though there have been a number of authors in world literature made famous through

translations of their work, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Leo Tolstoy, Orhan Pamuk being a few examples, the name of the translator remains invisible, the role of the translator too is rarely talked about. In recent times there has been a noticeable shift in Translation Studies and in the act of translation where translation itself has been considered an important tool of cultural exchange. In the south Asian countries, particularly the Indian subcontinent, the presence of a large number of languages adds further importance to the role of the translator. The act of translation becomes an act of ethnographic interpretation as well, but the translators remain neglected. Even after a lifetime of hard work, they often remain invisible like the backstage technicians of a successful play. The kind of disregard that the translators have to face can be understood from Rita Kothari's speech after winning the 2018 Vani Foundation Distinguished Translators' Award at Jaipur Literary Festival. She says, "Now that I have got an award, it explains that we are finally getting some recognition". Though she speaks of the Indian context, the situation remains the same almost everywhere. Tim Parkes, the renowned translator, while speaking of the Harville -Sacker prize for the young translator says in a candid expression, "The translator should do his job and then disappear. The great, charismatic, creative writer wants to be all over the globe". He rues the lack of visibility that always accompanies a translator in spite of all the hard work that goes into the act of translation. Selvadurai's anthology can be a step forward to counter such apathy towards translators. By placing the translators at par with the original writings in the book and by providing the short bio-notes of the translators alongside that of the authors in the back of the text, this anthology provides an identity to the translator. Translators' names are mentioned at the bottom left-hand corner of the first page of each work - a placing that gives visibility to the translator without taking it away from the original author whose name is mentioned, as per convention, just after the title. All these together make this anthology an important one from the perspective of politics of representation of translation as well.

Conclusion

Globalization and the digital revolution have turned the world into a global village with an increased interaction between people of diverse cultures. In such a social scenario, to promote a better understanding of each other and to save the world from turning into one monochromatic, homogenous platform, translators have an important role to play. With the increase in the number of people using English as their second language, any translation into English has a scope of reaching a very wide reader base. Translation facilitates conversation between cultures, beyond the linguistic barriers and generates an interest in the lesser-known cultures. In the postcolonial period translations also became an act of resistance. By translating the marginal, it challenges the dominant, the normative and the homogenous. Translations of Sinhalese and Tamil literature included in Selvadurai's edited anthology, *many roads through paradise* fulfill both these roles and much more. Firstly, it establishes a communication between three different streams of Sri Lankan literature which had been developing separately as a result of the language wars in the country. Secondly, as a postcolonial translation, it is a remarkable act of resistance and hybridity - the third space of contact where culture survives. While discussing Catford's theory of 'linguistic untranslatability' Bassnett says, "linguistic untranslatability is due to the differences in TL and SL, whereas cultural untranslatability is due to the absence in the TL culture, of a relevant situational feature for the SL text" (38). So, the untranslatability of culture specific expression or word reveals a gap in the Target Language, its inability to accommodate or explain certain cultural elements through its language system. This

think in the TL becomes the site of postcolonial resistance challenging the supremacy of the TL over SL.

Selavadurai's anthology points at the rising importance of translation as a practice in literature as well as culture studies. It is a significant movement in terms of providing visibility to the translator and to the activity of translation. In a positive way, *many roads through paradise* acknowledge the irreplaceable role of translation in presenting one's cultural heritage to the world. More such translations in various other languages should be taken up to continue the cultural and literary exchanges and mutually gain from the interactions.

References

- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*. 2nd ed. London; New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Bassnett, Susan. *Translation Studies*. New York, Routledge. 2005.
- Bassnett, Susan and Harish Trivedi (eds). *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*. London: New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Choudhuri, Indra Nath. 'Plurality of Languages and Literature in Translation: The Post-Colonial Context'. *Translation and Multilingualism: Post-Colonial Contexts*. Ed. Shantha Ramakrishna, (25-32) Delhi: Pencraft, 1997.
- Karunakaran, S. "'Lost in Translation': A Study of the History of Sri Lankan Literature". *The IJournal: Graduate Student Journal of the Faculty of Information*, Vol. 4, no. 1, Jan. 2019, pp. 22-31, <https://theijournal.ca/index.php/ijournal/article/view/32137>.
- Parkes, Tim 'Why Translators deserve some critics' *The Guardian* 25.04.2010. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/apr/25/book-translators-deserve-credit>
- Selvadurai, Shyam (ed) *Many Roads Through Paradise*. Delhi. Penguin, 2014.
- Tiffin, Helen, 'Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse', *Kunapipi*, 9(3), 1987.
- Tymoczko, Maria. "Translations of Themselves: The Contours of Postcolonial Fiction." *Changing the Terms: Translating in the Postcolonial Era*, edited by Sherry Simon and Paul St-Pierre, University of Ottawa Press, Ottawa, 2000, pp. 147-164. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1ckpcz7.11. Accessed 20 Nov. 2020.
- Verma, Smeetha. 'Literary translators empowering regional stories to find mainstream publishers, but not enough to revive this neglected segment'. *Financial Express*. dt. 20.02.2020. <https://www.financialexpress.com/lifestyle/literary-translators-empowering-regional-stories-to-find-mainstream-publishers-but-not-enough-to-revive-this-neglected-segment/1078142/>
- Wakkumbura, M.R. "Language Pluralism through the Administrative Service: The Use of the Official Languages Policy in Sri Lanka." *Journal of Public Administration and Policy Research*, 8(4), (2016). Pp.33-44.

As the Text Speaks: The Repressed Returns in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*

Dr. Oindrila Bhattacharya

Assistant Professor, Department of English and Literary Studies, Brainware University
Kolkata, West Bengal, India.

Mail id: oindrila.bhattacharya9@gmail.com | Orcid - [0009-0002-5244-9187](https://orcid.org/0009-0002-5244-9187)

Abstract

Chinua Achebe's novel, *No Longer at Ease*, which is a sequel to his *Things Fall Apart*, has aptly upheld the anxieties related to the formation of the-then new generation of Western- educated Nigerian elites through the depiction of the cardinal protagonist, Obi Okonkwo, the grandson of Okonkwo of *Things Fall Apart*. In fact, the projection of the character of Obi and the various circumstances that victimize him, makes evident as to how the author has tactfully sublimated his anxieties into his narrative, problematizing the text in order to project his painful entrapment between his indigenous roots which are about to "fall apart" under the colonial hegemony imposed by the prevailing European administration on the one hand, and the terribly manipulating and domineering colonial institutions on the other. To this newly formed generation, the subject-position becomes a blurry, hyphenated space because these young Nigerians on one hand in spite of their Western education are not recognized or accepted by the white-skinned Europeans, on the other hand are alienated by their indigenous people too as they look up at them with reverence and expectation that as they are Western-educated employed in "European posts", they must put forth an exemplary posh lifestyle. Thus, these new Nigerian elites on one hand have to repress their ethnic roots due to the ideologies imposed on them by their European education, on the other hand have to suffer rejection from the colonizers. *No Longer at Ease* becomes a semi-autobiographical novel, and my Paper aims to project how Achebe has used the 'Conscious' of the text to bring forth his anxieties (he is being: like Obi, a Western-educated Nigerian elite with parents who had converted themselves to Christianity) that he has to otherwise repress into the realm of the 'Unconscious'.

Keywords: *Repressed, Conscious, Unconscious, Ethnic, Hegemony*

Introduction

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe has already depicted that Okonkwo's eldest son, Nwoye has converted to Christianity, and has taken the Christian name, Isaac. The process of colonizing by the Europeans has been very tactful. The Christian missionaries have begun with exercising conversion among the outcastes, like the 'osu'-s, and the tortured mothers of twins. The Umuofians have been seen to have a superstition that twins are abominations of the earth, and very mercilessly they are seen to snatch away such babies from their mothers and throw them away in the forests leaving them to perish there. The helpless wailings of such poor newborns have inflicted the young mind of Nwoye. When his father, Okonkwo kills Ikemefuna who has been very close to Nwoye, who has loved Okonkwo like his own father, just to appease the Oracles, Nwoye finds the indigenous traditions and norms absolutely inhumane and thus cuts off his ties with his father thereby attempting to vigorously sever his indigenous roots, his ethnic identity.

In *No Longer at Ease*, the author continues to project how Isaac has acquired prosperity repressing his aboriginal roots to embrace Christianity and join the Church. "By Umuofia standards he was well-to-do. He had been a catechist of the Church Missionary Society for twenty-five years and then retired on a pension of twentyfive pounds a year" (Achebe 8). In fact, to highlight his prosperity, the author goes on to remark about Isaac, "He had been the very first man to build a 'zinc' house in Umuofia" (Achebe 8). Such an example, of course, has tempted more such conversions through which more and more indigenous people have repressed their ethnic roots often practicing Christianity with more zeal and enthusiasm than the Europeans themselves.

Isaac's over-enthusiasm and strong anxiety to project himself as Christian convert are apparent in the way he has emphasized his perspective while prohibiting the tradition of narrating ethnic tales to the young generations at his household: "We are not heathens,' he had said. 'Stories like that are not for the people of the Church" (Achebe 52).

The anxiety of the converted indigenous people to exhibit their faith on the new religion (Christianity), is also projected through Mary, an ethnic woman embracing Christianity, as depicted by the author: "Although Mary lived a long way from the church- three miles or more- she never missed the early morning prayer which the pastor conducted at cock-crow. In the heart of the wet season, or the cold harmattan, Mary was sure to be there" (Achebe 8). The conditioning of these converted indigenous people by the Christian missionaries has been so deft that, these neo-converts are always anxious to repress their indigenous identity, their ethnic self. That becomes the main reason as to why the practice of narrating to the young indigenous children ethnic folklores (of course African traditions, norms and customs initially have depended solely on oral narration), has been forbidden by these enthusiastic converts who are anxious enough to repress their ethnic identity as "heathen", for instance, Obi's father, who is also a Christian convert, who has rejected his indigenous identity as Nwoye and has taken up his Christianized identity as Isaac, has forbidden his wife, Hannah to tell their children such indigenous folktales: "In fact, she used to tell her eldest daughters stories. But that was before Obi was born. She stopped because her husband forbade her to do so" (Achebe 52). Isaac's

identity to thus repress his ethnic self is apparent in the way he has emphasized his perspective while prohibiting the tradition of narrating ethnic folklores to the new generation: "We are not heathens," he had said. "Stories like that are not for the people of the Church" (Achebe 52).

To Obi, during his stay in England, Nigeria becomes a nostalgia which has urged him to return to his indigenous roots: "It seemed more like a decade than four years, what with the miseries of winter then his longing to return home took on the sharpness of physical pain. It was in England that Nigeria first became more than just a name to him" (Achebe 11). The Europeans have been manipulative enough to tempt more young Nigerians away from their ethnic roots, offering the Western-educated ones lucrative posts in the various spheres of the European government with luxurious lodgings and other amenities, as can be found at Ikoyi: "It was once a European reserve. But things had changed, and some Africans in 'European posts' had been given houses in Ikoyi. Obi Okonkwo, for example lived there..." (Achebe 16).

Then there is the alienation within as the ethnic people including the clansmen of these Western-educated Nigerians expect them to maintain and show off a standard of living almost equal to that of the European colonizers. Their alienation from their ethnic clan happens as they are thus other-ed within. They are other-ed without too, as the Europeans in spite of the Western education or conversion into Christianity of these Nigerian elites, hold them with contempt and prejudice as bribe-takers, immoral and unethical.

Obi's pain and anxieties stem from the fact that he is torn between the various expectations from his ethnic people on one hand and on the other hand the ideologies imposed on him by his Western education which have required him to repress his ethnic norms, traditions, and even linguistic identity. Achebe, through Obi, and thus through the metaphor of his text, has depicted his own dilemma as in his European school the-then student-author has once been rebuked for requesting his classmate to pass a soap in his Igbo (Ibo) 'dialect'. Achebe has also often recounted as to how he like other indigenous children in his European school, has been psychologically drilled to worship the white-skinned heroes and hate the colored characters depicted as negative entities in canonical fiction written by European authors. Achebe has read *Gulliver's Travels* and *David Copperfield* together with John Buchan's *Prester John*. Achebe has later recalled that as a reader, he has taken sides with the white characters against the 'savages' and has even developed a dislike for Africans. Such has been the devastating effects of psychological drilling practiced on the Nigerian students in the Christian missionary schools. After completing his education at the Government College, Achebe has moved on to achieve further academic specializations at the University College. However, it was during his studies at Ibadan that he started becoming critical of European literature about Africa. After his final examinations at Ibadan in 1953, Achebe returns to his hometown of Ogidi. His pains, angst and anxieties on his return to his homeland are reflected in Obi's return from England. In the process of the projection of the various metaphorical situations in the novel, Achebe's repressed ethnic self is revived, as his unconscious finds a vent to return to the conscious, the text. Achebe has chosen his characters carefully to metaphorically represent his struggle to discover a subject-position as well as to exist desperately amidst the circumstances leading to exile.

The name 'Obi' is quite a symbolic one. If the name is written in reverse order, it reads as 'Ibo'. Thus, perhaps Obi as a Western-educated Nigerian born to parents who had converted themselves to Christianity, represents not only the author himself, but also many others of Nigeria who are lured away from their indigenous roots through conversion among one generation and Western education among the next. Obi and his Christian converted parents are metaphorical representations of Achebe and his parents. By problematizing the text, Achebe has projected the anxieties and dilemma from which such Western-educated Nigerians have been suffering as his repressed ethnic 'Self' returns to the 'Conscious' of his text through such metaphorical representations. Whereas on one hand, to the ethnic folks "To occupy a 'European post' was second only to actually being a European" (Achebe 84), on the other hand, in spite of conversion into Christianity or Western education, this new stratum of Nigerians is still held with contempt and prejudice by the European colonizers who regard them as unethical and 'bribe-takers', as is apparent in Mr. Green's biased remark: "The African is corrupt through and through...They are all corrupt" (Achebe 3).

Also, through the text, through the metaphorical situation of Obi, Achebe has focused on the concept of 'exile'. With the apparent financial and career-related success of the converted and Western education Nigerians, more and more Nigerians have got tempted to embrace the white man's religion and education, which has taken measures to condition them to repress their ethnic identity through various modes of colonization, including linguistic colonization. Thus, though apparently their exile, that is, their estrangement from their ethnic roots, may seem voluntary, yet is actually an involuntary one, an outcome of the manipulation and tactics of the colonizing whites. The subject-position of such Western educated Nigeria elites like Obi, and through Obi, Achebe, is blurry as they can identify themselves neither with their indigenous clansmen, nor with the Europeans. The dilemmatic position of this new Nigerian generation is that neither can they fall back upon the ways of living of the other ethnic people, nor can they smoothly fit into the expected lifestyle of an elite group as there is a constant psychological pressure on them to maintain themselves as the Western-educated well-to-do elites. About his ethnic people Obi says: "What they did not know was that having labored in sweat and tears to enroll their kinsman among the shining elite, they had to keep him there" (Achebe 90). Such constant pressure leads to Neurosis and eventually Psychosis and as a victim Obi becomes a metaphorical projection of similar such other young Nigerians. In case of Obi, who has got the appointment as Scholarship Secretary at the Federal Ministry of Education, the Lagos branch of the Umuofia Progressive Union which has paid eight hundred pounds for his overseas education, now expects him to repay the loan while maintaining a standard of living suitable to his newly acquired status as an elite with European education. As it is, Obi has already frustrated the expectations of his ethnic people who have sent him to study overseas so that, he will study Law in order to fight their land-cases on their behalf by studying English instead. This action of Obi's though has initially enraged his clansmen, yet later their anger has somewhat been pacified with their expectations that at least Obi will be securing for himself after all a 'European post' in the Civil Service.

Another dilemmatic situation entrapping Obi is his relationship with Clara who is an 'osu', who as per Igbo tradition, is an outcast and must live apart from the free born. Obi, being a free born, cannot marry Clara as per Igbo norms. His father, Isaac, in spite of his conversion and utter devotion to the white man's religion, cannot accept his son's relationship with Clara. Obi's mother, Hannah, also a Christian convert, strongly opposes her son's proposal to marry Clara. In fact, neither his clansmen, nor his parents, nor his friends have approved of the relationship, and this has been well apparent in their words. For instance, Obi's father has advised: "*Osu* is like leprosy in the minds of our people. I beg of you, my son, not to bring the mark of shame and of leprosy into your family..." (Achebe 121). Obi's mother firmly states, "If you want to marry this girl, you must wait until I am no more..." (Achebe 123). His friend, Joseph Okeke, who has been working as a clerk in the Survey Department remarks: "In future, when we are all civilized, anybody may marry anybody. But that time has not come. We of this generation are only pioneers" (Achebe 68). From these quoted words, it is also quite noteworthy as to how an indigenous Nigerian, here Obi's friend, his "country-man" (Achebe 12), Joseph representing many such other ethnic people, have been spontaneously calling themselves 'uncivilized' thereby emphasizing the fact as to how the European colonizers have successfully imposed and manufactured such a consensus due to which many such indigenous people believe that it is the Europeans who have shown them the light of the so-called civilization, thereby repressing into the realms of their unconscious their ethnic self, their ethnic culture, norms and traditions. Hybridization integrating the best features from the foreign culture with the best traits of the indigenous culture is of course an ideal state, but sadly, the mindset of the ethnic people like Joseph and such others has not been really ready to welcome such an ideal condition not through any adopt or adapt phase, but an adept phase. Another friend of Obi, Christopher, too, has not put forth any different mindset as he too disapproves of Obi's decision to marry Clara, as he says: "You may say that I am not broad-minded, but I don't think we have reached the stage where we can ignore all our customs. You may talk about education and so on, but I am not going to marry an *osu*" (Achebe 130). Obi is indeed torn between individual morality and his public responsibility. Achebe, through the depiction of Obi's dealings with the Umuofia Progressive Union and with his own parents, has successfully established the clash between the indigenous traditional values and the newly arrived Western values.

Obi's Western education holds this discrimination regarding 'osu' as illogical, but his clansmen and even his Christian converted parents expect him to respect this ethnic norm. Victimized to this anxiety, Obi fails to take any responsible action which compels Clara to abort her baby, risking her life in the process.

Struggling to meet up to the various expectations from him by his family, his clansmen, his fiancée, and the European administration with all its ideologies imposed on him through its 'Western-ized' education and other policies in his work-place presided over by the Englishman, Mr. Green and other European colleagues, like Miss Tomlinson, Obi fails as a pathetic victim of various anxieties and ambiguities as he suffers from Neurosis and then Psychosis which have led him to his indecisiveness and the resulting blunders that he commits, including his accepting

bribes. His blunders have pathetically alienated him from within as well as without, from his indigenous people, family, and his fiancée, Clara.

These blunders which he has committed after reaching the crossroads due to the various expectations that have imposed on him acute financial pressure, have alienated him from within and without as he fails to identify a properly defined subject-position for himself as he fails to fit into the subject-position of an ordinary Igbo man or of a person akin to the Europeans who have imposed on him Western education.

Perhaps there is an indication that if Western education and job at European post have estranged Obi from his family, then Obi's father, Isaac's conversion into Christianity has alienated him from his father, Ogbuefi Okonkwo. The anxieties of conversion and repression of the ethnic self, have so strongly affected Obi, that he ultimately becomes an alienated existence both in his public as well as his private spheres of life, from the European colonizers on the one hand and his indigenous people on the other, as also from his converted family, and this neatly projected in the closing lines of the novel, where it is well depicted as to how nobody tries to comprehend Obi's situation, that how the pressures exerted on him from within and without, have disintegrated him, have fragmented him, and have led him astray: "The learned judge, as we have seen, could not comprehend how an educated young man and so on and so forth. The British Council man, even the men of Umuofia, did not know" (Achebe 154).

The anxieties which such Western-educated Nigerians like Obi, including Achebe himself, have so long repressed into the realms of the 'Unconscious', have through Obi's situation thus returned to the 'Conscious' of the text, that is the novel itself, where the author perhaps has indicated that an ideal Hybridization of the best indigenous traits with the best traits of the colonizing West is desirable to provide this new Nigerian generation some respite from the already incurred damages wrought by the colonizing Europeans.

References

- Achebe, Chinua. *No Longer at Ease*. London: William Heinemann, 1960. Print.
- Baral, K. C. *Sigmund Freud: A Study of His Theory of Art and Literature*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Ltd, 1995. Print.
- Bhattacharya, Oindrila. "Hybridization- A Strategy Towards Survival of The Fittest: A Psychoanalysis of The Trilogy of Chinua Achebe". *Diss.* University of Calcutta, 2013. Print.
- Heywood, Christopher (ed.). *Perspectives on African Literature*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1971. Print.
- Innes, C. L. and Bernth Lindfors (ed.). *Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe*. London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1978. Print.

Lakshmi, Bounty and Cultural Deification: A Review of *Treasures of Lakshmi – The Goddess who Gives* by Namita Gokhale and Malashri Lal

Sreetanwi Chakraborty

Assistant Professor, Amity Institute of English Studies and Research, Amity University Kolkata, India.

Mail id: schakraborty3@kol.amity.edu | Orcid: [0000-0002-2936-222X](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2936-222X)

Bibliographic Information:

Name of the Book: Treasures of Lakshmi – The Goddess who Gives

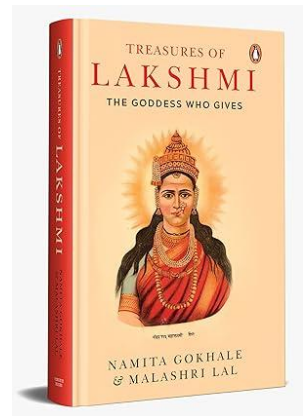
Author: Namita Gokhale and Malashri Lal

Publisher: Penguin Books

Language: English

ISBN: 978-0-143-45986-6

Price: INR 499



Indian mythology and cultural constructiveness have always seen Lakshmi as the goddess who gives, Lakshmi as the goddess of bounty and fortune. If we scrutinize the cross-cultural segments of Greek, Roman, and Indian mythology, we find that in the treatment of Lakshmi and Aphrodite, the themes of beauty, fertility, and abundance, are highlighted. Whereas Lakshmi is said to have emerged from the churning of the cosmic ocean (the *Samudra Manthan*), Aphrodite was born from sea foam. Even Lakshmi, Tyche (Greek) and Fortuna (Roman) share the common themes of prosperity and material opulence. It is true how the interactions between Indian and Greco-Roman civilizations created the connections between Lakshmi and the Greek goddesses. Additionally, the Yavana (Greek) influence in the entire matrix of Indian art and iconography, particularly in the field of Gandhara art, has contributed to visual motifs while depicting the deities.

Treasures of Lakshmi – The Goddess Who Gives by Namita Gokhale and Malashri Lal is the culmination of the Indian goddess trilogy, edited and curated by these two authors. The trilogy had its inception with *In Search of Sita: Revisiting Mythology*, continued with *Finding Radha: The Quest for Love*, and reaches its crescendo with the perfect harmonization of the sacred, the feminine, and the quintessential female whose footprints allow everyone to flourish. *Treasures of Lakshmi – The Goddess Who Gives* is divided into four distinct sections, with the main text being introduced with the hymns to Lakshmi and a riveting introduction by Malashri Lal, where she adroitly points out, “Within that vast framework, the first section unveils Lakshmi’s essence in the ‘divine interpretations’ proffered by historians, economists, storytellers, and mythologists.” (Lal xxxi) It is true how the basic essence of Lakshmi’s arrival, defining India and the Kubera Lakshmi effect in the cultural studies

of India, receives a detailed, insightful writing in the pages of the book. Right from Bibek Debroy's idea of Lakshmi's manifestation and omnipresence to Jawhar Sircar's idea of Lakshmi as a metaphor for prosperity and also for fickleness in terms of wealth, there are multiple interpretations of Lakshmi with which the first section commences. The book abounds in relating textual evidence, symbols, connections to the Yakshi cult, and the regional variations in different parts of India. For instance, there is a reference to the northern and western regions of India, where Lakshmi is worshipped on a lavish scale on the day of *Amavasya*, the night of the darkest moon, and also on the day of Diwali, when there is light all across the country. It is commendable how the book traverses across the multifaceted realms of the Indian territory and delves deeper into the region-specific, culture-specific originalities in ushering the goddess of wealth.

In *Legends of Devi*, by Sukumari Bhattacharji, the chapter on Lakshmi elaborates on the various domains, categories, and the euphemistic ideas about the goddess:

"In the battlefield, she is the goddess of victory, Jayalakshmi, who, as fickle as fortune, changes sides. A good wife is euphemistically called Grihalakshmi, the goddess of domestic prosperity. As Bhagyalakshmi, she grants fortune and preserves it. As Yasholakshmi, the goddess is associated with fame...she lives within the sacrifice which yields desired objects and is equated with Dakshina, the sacrificial fee." (Bhattacharji 13)

So, in the Indian context, there are multilayered references to Lakshmi, the Goddess who gives. In *Treasures of Lakshmi*, it is not just about the taut detailing of the origin of Lakshmi that gains prominence, but it is also about the iconography, cultural, spiritual, and ritualistic symbols and images that are widely discussed. Bulbul Sharma's chapter titled 'Enticing Lakshmi' creates an unbeatable aura around the Goddess and the female devotees who invite her to their homes during Lakshmi puja. Sharma's recollection of the *alpana*, or the folk-art style consisting of motifs and symbols on walls and floors, mango leaves, and ghot or the vessel, ushers in and embraces the essence of the quintessential Lakshmi puja in the Indian homes. Sharma writes, "Once the mango leaves have passed scrutiny, the women place five or seven perfect ones on the ghot. Then a few bananas, a gleaming green coconut and some other fresh fruits available in the house are arranged around the ghot in a circle along with some sweets. A special sweet made with coconut and jaggery called 'naroo' is always offered to the goddess." (Sharma 98)

In the other chapters of this section titled *Exploring Lakshmi's Mystique: Creative Interpretations*, the writers discuss the churning of the ocean and Lakshmi's *agaman*, the Nagarlakshmi, a translation of Tagore's work by Reba Som, another translation Lakshmi's *Agaman* written by Bonophul and translated by Arunava Sinha, are detailed studies to understand and reflect upon the various social and familial strands that Lakshmi as a concept unfurls. One special attribute of this section is *Give Us More, More, More* – poems by Sanjukta Dasgupta. Interspersed with strong images of Lakshmi on the earth, Dasgupta's poems also highlight the simultaneous reading of Lakshmi and Alakshmi who are 'immortal Siamese twins' existing on the same plane. She elaborates how Lakshmi sits in happy homes, sad homes, rich homes, poor homes everywhere, but one of the poems ends on a thoughtful paradigm – "Does Lakshmi regret that she is immortal?"

Treasures of Lakshmi also ventures into the interesting studies concerning the folk narratives and the cultural interpretations surrounding the goddess of wealth. Nilima Chitgopekar's *Tulsi: The Sylvan Form of Devi* or the reference to the *Manabasa Lakshmi Purana: The Redeemer of the Poor* written by Balaram Das and translated by Lipipuspa Nayak, the darker side of fortune, how Lakshmi tests Khiri, and how the goddess of

wealth is known by many names are some of the major areas on which the folk narrative segment rests. In fact, as Gokhale and Lal have compiled this voluminous work on Lakshmi, they have also not ignored the social implications of worshipping the goddess. Social hierarchy, discrimination, people at different social strata – nobody is bereft of the benedictions of Lakshmi. For instance, in the chapter titled *Manabasa Lakshmi Purana: The Redeemer of the Poor*, the translator Lipipuspa Nayak refers to the lane of the *chandaals*, where the Devi lived – “Shriya, a woman in that lane of chandaals, lived outside Puri, the premises of the kingdom of Lord Jagannath. And lo! Her greatness as a devotee was not known to the gods. She swept clean the streets of the kingdom of Lord Jagannath every day with rapturous devotion for the Lord.” (Nayak 241)

Words that resonate with the mundane and the spiritual world, sentences that bring back memories of Lakshmi puja to the present, and images that are a fine combination of the cryptic and the elaborate channelization of the obeisance to the Devi. The book has a very strong interlayered reader-response theoretical aspect, where the authors leave space for constructing meaning from the text. With suitable cues, symbols, ritualistic grandeur and imminent psychological nuances pervading the descriptive matrix, Lakshmi emerges and reaffirms herself every time, with each single, repeated reading. It is not just about the cultural construction of femininity that becomes obvious in a unidimensional reading, but the text has suitable intertexts, translations, poems, and critical insights that correspond to what Namita Gokhale writes in her Afterword – “The complex Hindu system of belief is not bound by any single book, text or decree. It nurtures a multiplicity of understanding and interpretation. Our anthology delves into the enigma of Lakshmi, her secrets, her treasures, her many blessings.” (Gokhale 310)

The elusive and *chanchala*, fleeting nature of the goddess is not unknown in the whole realm of spirituality. But the text makes a platform for creative and critical thinking to preserve Lakshmi among the readers. It is fascinating how the book acts as a polyphonic text and does not dissipate into unrealistic or incongruent realms of blind faith and worship. Rather, it renavigates the sense of usual closures that we might feel after reading a book on gods and goddesses. Therein lies the beauty of *Treasures of Lakshmi – The Goddess who Gives*.

Reference:

Bhattacharji, Sukumari, and Ramananda Bandyopadhyay. *Legends of Devi*. Orient Blackswan, 1995.