AN EXPLORATION OF THE SHIFTING VALUE OF MODERN HINDI LITERATURE IN TRANSLATION

by

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Abstract

World literary and translation studies scholarship has often operated what Emily Apter terms a 'translatability assumption', in which literature can be converted from one language into another without any significant change. This thesis fosters an alternative engagement; one that accepts the inevitability of 'untranslatability' occurring when a text moves between two languages. Challenging the 'translatability assumption' through a close study of three award-winning Hindi texts, published between 1980 and 2010, and their accompanying English translations, this thesis examines how the skill, position, and commitments of a translator affects the translation itself, and how a variety of gatekeepers in the Hindi literary sphere, including publishers, awards bodies, the academy and media, help shape how readers encounter and respond to Hindi literature in translation. I demonstrate this through close interpretations of existing translations of the three case study texts I have chosen as well as providing alternate translations of my own where appropriate. This thesis attests to the ongoing importance of "subalternity" in marketing translated Hindi literature nationally and internationally. It also suggests that the translator has been a crucial figure in contributing to the success of world literature as a genre including Hindi literature in translation.

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Introduction

The Booker Prize has never been a stranger to controversy, from celebrity outbursts to rivalries that have threatened to overshadow the ceremony.[1] As James F. English points out, this controversial history has not detracted from the Booker's prestige.[2] In fact it has helped cement the Booker into the iconic cultural institution it is today, providing a push-and-pull dynamic between the 'serious fiction' it espouses and the 'rows and scandals' left behind in its wake.[3] 2016 saw yet another controversy embroil the Booker, this time in the form of its sibling prize the International Booker, which was awarded for the first time for an outstanding piece of translated fiction where previously it had been awarded as a lifetime honour. The inaugural winner was Deborah Smith's translation of Han Kang's Korean-language novel *The Vegetarian*. The controversy arose over the quality and style of Smith's translation and was discussed in numerous prominent North American and British media outlets

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[1] Katy Stoddard, 'Man Booker prize: a history of controversy, criticism and literary greats', *The Guardian*, updated 14 October 2014 https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/from-the-archive-blog/2011/oct/18/booker-prize-history-controversy-criticism [accessed 11 July 2019], Thomas Flynn, 'The 12 Biggest Booker Prize Controversies', *The Daily Beast*, updated 4 July 2017, https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-12-biggest-booker-prize-controversies [accessed 11 July 2019]

[2] James F. English, 'Winning the Culture Game: Prizes, Awards and the Rules of Art', *New Literary History*, Vol 33 No. 1, (2002), pp. 109-135 (p. 117)

[3] Ibid

including *The New Yorker*, *The Guardian* and the *New York and Los Angeles Review of Books.*[4]

As has been pointed out by Charse Yun, early media reporting on *The Vegetarian* was largely focused on Smith, indicating that the translation's young British female translator was part of its commercial appeal.[5] A profile in *Public Radio International* exemplifies this, describing Smith, at the time a 28-year-old PhD candidate at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), as someone who 'knows [Korean] imperfectly' but 'reads about 200 books a year' and is therefore 'overqualified' to 'recreate the Korean novel's style and voice' in English.[6] Yet following an initial wave of success upon publication, Smith's translation was criticised for its mistranslations and omissions.[7] Most damning was the charge that Smith had significantly altered Kang's 'style and tone' in translation: where Han Kang's 'sentences are spare and quiet … Smith uses a high, formal style with lyrical flourishes'.[8]

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[4] Claire Armitstead, 'Lost in (mis)translation? English take on Korean novel has critics up in arms', *The Guardian*, 15 January 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2018/jan/15/lost-in-mistranslation-english-take-on-korean-novel-has-critics-up-in-arms [accessed 31 August 2019]

[5] Charse Yun, 'Deborah Smith's Flawed yet Remarkable Translation of "The Vegetarian"', 2 July 2017, https://www.koreaexpose.com/deborah-smith-translation-han-kang-novel-vegetarian/ [accessed 31 August 2019]

[6] PRI's The World, 'How a self-taught translator created a literary masterpiece one word at a time', *PRI*, 18 May 2016 https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-05-18/how-self-taught-translator-created-literary-masterpiece-one-word-time [accessed 31 August 2019]

[7] 'Deborah Smith's Flawed yet Remarkable Translation of "The Vegetarian"'

[8] Ibid

In a response piece, Smith challenges her detractors without naming them, though her arguments lack cogency. She wields her gender as a somewhat improbable defence (her critics, such as Yun, being mostly male) arguing that 'translation is often spoken of as a feminized profession' and questioning whether 'the overwhelming focus on *The Vegetarian*'s aesthetics is a way of avoiding talking about its politics', referring specifically to the novel's portrayal of gender politics and South Korea's criminalisation of marital rape.[9] Not only is this an ineffectual and unfair response to Yun and others' generous and carefully considered criticism, it also neatly sidesteps one of the most troubling aspects of the controversy - the question of Smith's globally recognised cultural and social capital relative to Kang's as determined by her race, nationality and knowledge of English - in favour of casting Smith as a victim of sorts due to her gender. Nonetheless Smith has not suffered unduly as a result of the controversy. She has continued to produce translations of Kang's other works and has set up an independent press, Titled Axis Press, which seeks to 'shake up contemporary international literature' by publishing 'books that might not otherwise make it into English'.[10]

The spectre of *The Vegetarian* controversy looms large in this project, due to the questions it raises about the current world literary sphere. It signals the growing

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[9] Deborah Smith, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Translation* (2018) https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/what-we-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-translation/ [accessed 15 October 2019]

[10] https://www.tiltedaxispress.com/about [accessed 31 August 2019]

popularity of literature in translation and secondly, demonstrates that this popularity

is mirrored by literary awards culture. Moreover, it leads us to ask: how do

translators navigate and perform their solidarity with authors, particularly when the

translator possesses greater cultural and social capital than the author due to their

race, nationality and fluency in English? If world literature in translation is achieving

its success partly as a result of translators such as Smith, whose cultural and social

capital largely outstrips that of the non-Anglophone writers they are translating, how

does this alter both the translations they produce in English as well as their reception

both nationally and internationally? Lastly, when a translation differs from the original

text how do we grapple with the arising 'translation zone'?[11] Smith's invocation of her

gender to deflect criticism also speaks to the way in which marginality can be

commodified and put to use in today's literary market not only to sell a text but also

to market its author or translator. Her comment regarding her critics' focus on

'aesthetics' over *The Vegetarian*'s 'politics' also raises an interesting point: can

aesthetics be decoupled from politics in translations? I demonstrate the opposite:

that translators and writers alike use aesthetics to *express* political ideology. The

questions that arise from this controversy transcend *The Vegetarian*, Smith's

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[11] The translation zone is identified by Stefan Helgesson as 'an expandable, multilingual *textual zone*,

issuing from multiple subjectivities, produced in discrete systems of publication, and constituting

thereby the effective world-literary existence of a poem or a novel'. See Stefan Helgesson,

'Translation and the Circuits of World Literature' in *The Cambridge Companion to World Literature*,

ed. by Ben Etherington and Jarad Zimbler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 85-99

(p. 97

translation and the South Korean context; they are applicable to the translation of world literature generally and to modern Hindi literature in translation in particular.

On the stage of international literary prestige, Indian literature has a distinctive history as its trajectory has been indelibly shaped by literary awards culture. Indian literature in English 'arrived' on the international literary scene as a force to be reckoned with Salman Rushdie's watershed Booker win in 1981 for *Midnight's Children*. Amit Chaudhuri describes Indian writing in English as being 'handcuffed to the Booker' and recalls that whenever a new Indian author wins the prize, Indian newspapers are prompted 'to proclaim [that]: "Indian writing has come of age"'.[12] While Anglophone writing dominated in the 1980s and 1990s, recent years have seen greater critical and mainstream attention given to the subcontinent's vernacular writing, which has in turn led to a higher quantity and better quality of English translations. India-based imprints and small presses such as Penguin and Smith's own Titled Axis Press have brought out English translations of contemporary vernacular works, including Perumal Murugan's *One Part Woman* (2014), KR Meera's *Hangwoman* (2016) and Sangeeta Bandopadhyay's *Panty* (2016), to acclaim. Meanwhile, well-known translators such as Daisy Rockwell and Jerry Pinto have translated canonical vernacular writers including Upendranth Ashk, Shrilal Shukla and Malika Amar Shaikh into English. The fact that global literary prize culture has welcomed this growth in Indian translations, as it has translation more

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[12] Amit Chaudhuri, 'The Piazza and the Parking Lot: Arvind Krishna Mehrotra and literary activism', *n+1*, 23 October 2015 https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/the-piazza-and-the-parking-lot/ [accessed 23 June 2019]

generally, is evidenced by success stories such as Vivek Shanbhag's *Ghachar Ghochar* (2015), which received international awards recognition from the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize and the International Dublin Literary Award.

The rise of high-quality translations emerging from the subcontinent has been foregrounded in the growth of literary prizes that recognise or focus on translations.[13] This includes prizes operating on a global scale as well as South Asia-based prizes, such as the DSC Prize and newly instituted JCB Prize. In today's post-liberalisation, increasingly prosperous India, organisations such as the DSC and JCB Prizes have sufficient financial resources to compete with international prizes such as the Booker in terms of prize money and global influence. This is evidenced by the fact that though the winner of the DSC Prize is awarded annually in a different region of the subcontinent, the shortlisting ceremony typically takes place in the London School of Economics in the United Kingdom, demonstrating the award's significance to Anglophone readers and the Anglosphere generally.[14] A South Asian writer has yet to the win the International Booker Prize but a robust regional awards industry, which promises financial restitution consistent with international prizes as well as a growing international profile for its winner, goes some way to make up for this. The current moment of South Asian translations' growing prestige and popularity represents

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[13] I would define high-quality translations as those that effectively and accurately capture much of the content, intonation and style of the original text, while also remaining accessible to readers in the language into which it has been translated, e.g. English.

[14] See http://dscprize.com/2019/09/26/longlist-announced-for-the-dsc-prize-for-south-asian-literature-2019/ [accessed 30 August 2019].

another 'coming of age' for South Asian writing, this time in the vernacular, as recognised by gatekeeping entities such as publishing companies, the media and prize bodies. My project works backwards from this current moment to understand the preceding four decades that have contributed to the greater profile of translated literature and better grasp some of the tensions relating to generation, reception and shifting value that have accompanied this cultural ascendance.

Francesca Orsini charts early developments in the modern Indian translation industry in her essay, 'Decreed out of existence? Multilingual India and world literature'.[15] She highlights the 1990s as a turning point for translations coming out of India, noting that prior to this period, 'translations from English had been haphazard or official affairs (i.e. not commercial or literary)'.[16] The 1990s represented a turning point as it was this period that witnessed an academic market for translations begin to blossom due to the work of Indian academics and activists.[17] I locate the three texts that I use as case studies within this historical trajectory. My first case study is Nirmal Verma's short story 'Kavve aur kālā pānī' from the anthology *Kavve aur kālā pānī*, an English version of which was published by Readers International in 1991 as part of the translated anthology *The Crows of Deliverance*. Despite being published in 1991, this translation fits the 'haphazard' designation that Orsini argues typified

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[15] Francesca Orsini, 'Decreed out of existence: Multilingual India and World Literature' in *Towards a Global Literature/Verso uni letteratura globalizzata*, ed. by Tim Parks and Edoardo Zuccato (Milan: marcos y marcos, 2013), pp. 37-46 (p. 41)

[16] Ibid

[17] Ibid

Indian translations prior to the 1990s; I discuss its shortcomings, particularly relating to certain stylistic choices and the accuracy of conveying the interplay of English and Hindi, in chapter one. My second case study is Geetanjali Shree's *Maī*, translated by Nita Kumar and published by Kali for Women in 2000. In my second chapter, I explore the phenomenon that Orsini illustrates of Indian feminist scholars, activists and literary historians in the 1990s taking a greater interest in the work of vernacular writers such as Shree and how this in turn impacted the translation and eventual publication of *Maī* in English. My final case study is Uday Prakash's short story published in Hindi as a standalone novella *Mohan dāsa* and translated by Jason Grunebaum and published as part of the anthology *Three Walls of Delhi* by UWA Press in 2012. In chapter three, I consider the factors that led to the greater success of *Mohan dāsa* relative to *Maī* or 'Kavve aur kālā pānī'. By contextualising the trajectory that Orsini has identified through an examination of three specific texts, I seek to provide a further insight into the evolution of the Indian translation and publishing landscape over the last four decades and illustrate how Indian literature in translation has achieved its current moment of watershed cultural success. Whereas Orsini provides a general insight into the development of the translation landscape, I expand on her work by providing a more granular level of understanding of three distinct points within the trajectory that she maps out.

In addition to this, I track the changing role of the translator in my case study chapters, beginning with Verma's translator's Jai Ratan and Kuldip Singh and ending with Uday Prakash's translator Jason Grunebaum, an American academic. Ratan, a businessman with a 'passion for translation', produced translations in the latter half of the twentieth century and his work was often shoddy, perhaps due to his lack of

vocational or literary training.[18] Grunebaum, by contrast, is a present-day

professional translator and academic, with an MFA in Fiction from the University of

Columbia as well as experience as an interpreter in the aid industry. The evolution of

translators from the likes of enthusiastic hobbyists such as Ratan to professionals

such as Grunebaum is one reason why translated fiction has achieved greater levels

of success in recent years. Moreover, translation itself is not an automatic ticket to

national or international recognition as a text's reception often depends upon a

translator's skill and ideological position taking. A combination of greater

professionalisation as well as arguably greater market savvy has helped contribute

to the success of twenty-first century translators.

Critical approaches

Emily Apter's *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Translatability* has been

particularly instructive in my close reading of Ratan, Singh, Kumar and Grunebaum's

translations. In *Against World Literature*, Apter problematises trends in world literary

studies that uncritically celebrate both 'cultural equivalence and substitutability' and

'nationally and ethnically branded "differences" that have been niche-marketed as

commercialized "identities"'.[19] Due to this, Apter argues 'incommensurability and

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[18] Daisy Rockwell, 'Five timeless translations to read, and what bad translations are', *scroll.in*, 26 July

2015, https://scroll.in/article/743830/five-timeless-translations-to-read-and-what-bad-translations-are

[accessed 12 September 2019]

[19] Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, (London, New York:

Verso Books, 2017), p. 2

what has been called the Untranslatable are insufficiently built into the literary heuristic' of world literary studies, adding that 'translation theory has used "border-crossing" as a prime metaphor of general equivalence, ready meaning-exchange, and interdisciplinarity'.[20] Apter problematises these tendencies by challenging the metaphor of 'border-crossing', for example in the form of checkpoints in the occupied territories of Palestine. For Apter, such checkpoints represent moments of 'non-transitivity and untranslatability' that challenge the metaphor of translation as seamless border crossing between languages, cultures and countries. In my case studies, I also seek to draw attention to the moments of 'non-transitivity and untranslatability' that arise when attempting to convert Hindi texts into English in an effort to resist, what Apter calls, the dominant 'translatability assumption'.

Where Apter considers physical obstructions such as checkpoints and other forms of border control as representative of wider geopolitical struggles, I home in on those areas of Verma, Shree and Prakash's work that most resist translation into English, such as the nuances of caste, religion and use of Indian English by educated Indians. These are areas that resist suitable or satisfactory translation into English partly because, in the case of caste and religion, certain nuances are baked into the original Hindi diction (partly due to the Sanskrit etymological root of many words in use in modern standard Hindi, which I discuss shortly) or because the English translation is unable to adequately represent the linguistic differences present in the original Hindi text through use of English or other minor dialects. My analysis

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[20] Ibid, pp. 3 & 100

emphasises these moments in Ratan, Singh, Kumar and Grunebaum's translations in order to problematise the logic of both the marketplace and the assumptions of some parts of world literary and translation studies scholarship that texts can travel seamlessly between the borders of different languages without any significant alteration or loss.

While a focus on translation accounts for the bulk of my argument, awards bodies, such as the Sahitya Akademi, DSC and JCB Prizes, form an integral connection between all three writers and texts with which I am working. The work of critics such as Amit Chaudhuri, James F. English, Graham Huggan and Sarah Brouillette on literary awards culture, the connection between culture and governance and marketplace activism has been integral to my arguments on how both the generation and reception of Indian literature in translation is shaped by literary awards culture. Whereas Chaudhuri, English, Huggan and Brouillette's work focuses largely on South Asian or postcolonial writing in English, I consider their arguments in light of our present-day moment where vernacular literature in translation is achieving a cultural impact on par with writing originally composed in English and investigate the role that literary awards aimed at vernacular or translated writing have played in helping cement this cultural success.

The history and politics of the Hindi literary sphere

Franco Moretti's critical framework concerning a 'world system' of languages frames my analysis of the movement of texts from a 'peripheral' language, Hindi, into the

'hyper-central' language of global dominance, English. [21] The history of Hindi as a language is rife with divisions along lines of caste and religion, which in turn impacts the use of Hindi by vernacular writers. Despite its status as a national language in India, Hindi literature is most accurately classified as a regional literature as both its writers and audiences are largely based in North India, specifically the states known as the Hindi heartland: Bihar, Chattisgarh, Delhi, Haryana, Himanchal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarkhand and Uttar Pradesh. These states, with the occasional inclusion of Punjab, have seen the greatest evolution of the Hindi language since the nineteenth century.[22] All three writers whose work I am considering in my project have their origins in these states. Verma and Shree both hail from Uttar Pradesh whereas Prakash is originally from Madhya Pradesh. Delhi, the centre of Hindi and Urdu literary culture and collegial networks, has also played an important role in all three authors' professional lives.

As Pascale Casanova notes in *The World Republic of Letters*, 'language is at once an affair of state and the material out of which literature is made', signifying that the use of language for literary purposes cannot be extricated from its use in political life

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[21] Moretti's ranked system of world languages refers to both '*source* languages (languages from which books are translated)' as well as '*target* languages (languages *into* which books are translated)' and English dominates in both these aspects, cementing its hyper-centrality. Meanwhile 'peripheral' and 'semi-peripheral' languages, such as Hindi, Arabic, etc., rank low as both source and target languages. See, Stefan Helgesson, 'Translation and the Circuits of World Literature', p. 86; Franco Moretti, 'World-Systems Analysis, Evolutionary Theory, "Weltliteratur"', *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, Vol. 28. No. 5, (2005), pp. 217-228

[22] Alok Rai, *Hindi Nationalism (Tracts for the times)* (India: Orient Blackswan, 2007)

and use by the state.[23] In order to understand Verma, Shree and Prakash's use of Hindi in their writing as well, it is important to have an understanding of Hindi's divided history. The most prominent cleavage in the history of the Hindi language is a communal one: the divide between Hindi and Urdu. Hindi and Urdu are accepted by linguists as an example of digraphia; the same language that employs two different writing systems.[24] Despite this, the lay public perceives Hindi and Urdu as separate languages, partly due to the languages' identification with different religious communities (Hindus versus Muslims) and their deployment as the national languages of two geopolitical rivals, India and Pakistan.

In their earliest incarnation, Hindi and Urdu were loosely recognised as the same dialect "Hindustani" which was the official 'local vernacular' of North India and in regular use in this region.[25] "Hindustani" had three writing systems: the Perso-Arabic script Nastaliq (today used for Urdu) and the Abugida scripts Kaithi and DevaNagari (the latter is currently used for Hindi). Nastaliq was the script used for Hindustani for official purposes in nineteenth century North India, partly due to the influence of the Muslim Avadh elite, who were the dominant administrative and land-owning class of the nineteenth century.[26] However, this era also saw the rise of a new Hindi elite, who would come to challenge the existing Muslim elite, and would be responsible for

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[23] Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. by M.B. DeBevois, (United States: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 34

[24] See: Rizwan Ahmad, 'Urdu in Devanagari: Shifting orthographic practices and Muslim identity in Delhi', *Language in Society*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (2011), pp. 259-284

[25] Alok Rai, *Hindi Nationalism (Tracts for the times)* (India: Orient Blackswan, 2007), p. 27

[26] Ibid, p. 114

forging Hindi into the language in use today.[27] As a result of these two oppositional groups, the colonial era saw the gradual divergence of "Hindustani" into two distinct registers: one which borrowed liberally from Sanskrit and the other which took inspiration from Persian and Arabic.[28] The register that borrowed from Sanskrit would eventually be identified with the Devanagari script, forming the base for modern Hindi, while the Perso-Arabic register was associated with the Nastaliq script, becoming an antecedent of contemporary Urdu. Today, Hindi is largely associated with Hindus and India, meanwhile Urdu is associated with Muslims and Pakistan. As India's politics have moved from the liberal centre in the post-Independence Nehruvian period toward the right in the current Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) dominated period, the ideologies and affiliations of India's artists and writers have also shifted. As Casanova points out, the official and political uses of a language cannot be ignored by a nation's litterateurs. Therefore, it is unsurprising that these historical developments can be sensed in the writing of Verma, Shree and Prakash, even if they are not highlighted explicitly.

The second, less infamous yet equally significant cleavage that occurred during Hindi's history relates to caste, a form of subalternity/marginality that is present to varying extents in both Prakash's *Mohan dāsa* and Shree's *Maī.* As mentioned previously, "Hindustani" employed *three* different writing systems in the colonial era, one of which was Kaithi, or Kayasthi. Rai notes that Kaithi (literally, "the script of the Kayasthas") was one of the most commonly used scripts for "Hindustani" in the

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[27] Ibid

[28] Ibid, p. 22

nineteenth century, partly due to its association with the Kayastha caste, the Hindu

upper caste of clerics and scribes, who formed an integral part of the colonial

administrative backbone.[29] While Kayasthas belong to the upper echelons of the

Hindu caste hierarchy, they are outranked by the highest caste: the priestly

Brahmins. Hindus and Muslims alike employed the Kaithi script; however in the late

nineteenth century pro-Hindi activists were making the argument that it should be

replaced with the DevaNagari script: "the script of the Brahmins".[30] The move to oust

Kaithi in favour of DevaNagari, as well as the liberal borrowing of terms and words

from Sanskrit, carried a strong implication of caste chauvinism. As Sumathi

Ramaswamy points out, Sanskrit had largely been the 'provenance if not

normatively, at least in everyday practice, to twice-born upper caste men (and to a

lesser extent, women)' and largely 'denied' to India's 'vast underclasses'.[31] By

campaigning for the official language of North India to be a heavily Sanskritised

"Hindustani" written in a script associated with the Brahmin caste, Hindi campaigners

drew a direct connection between high-caste dominance and the apparatus of the

state. Their campaign was successful and they not only displaced Kaithi in favour of

DevaNagari but also doomed the Kaithi script to obsolescence, as it is no longer in

use anywhere in India today. At the birth of India as a new post-colonial nation using

Hindi as a national language, the seeds of Hindu and high caste cultural and political

hegemony had already been sown by colonial activists and campaigners.

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[29] Ibid, p. 52-3

[30] Ibid, p. 52-3

[31] Sumathi Ramaswamy, 'Sanskrit for the Nation', *Modern Asian Studies*, (1999), Vol. 33, No. 2, pp. 339-381 (p. 350)

Unsurprisingly, these developments continue to reverberate for present-day Hindi writers of all castes and religious backgrounds. In my case study chapters, I use this history to foreground my analysis of how Verma, Shree and Prakash engage with questions of caste and how caste inflects all levels of Indian society, including the use of Hindi.

Gatekeepers in the Hindi literary sphere

These developments have also affected the institutions and bodies that have arisen in the post-Independence Indian literary landscape and act as gatekeepers of different kinds. In the context of this thesis, I define the term "gatekeeper" as any party that helps curate the level of access to publication that a writer or text is granted or helps determine the level of success said writer or text is able to achieve. Author and translator Alison Anderson demonstrates how gatekeeping operates in the literary sphere, with specific reference to the frequency with which literature written by women is translated. Anderson identifies a variety of figures as gatekeepers, most of whom are from historically male-dominated professions including publishers, reviewers, critics and what she terms 'the unconscious, invisible, inner gatekeeper: the women publisher and/or reader who simply doesn't realize her preference for literature by men and by, extension, the well-intentioned but busy and unaware male publisher, the one who says, "We just want to publish

the best work as we find it'".[32] She also refers to awards organisations, both those

tailored to a general audience such as the Palme D'Or at the Cannes film festival as

well as corrective awards such as the Bailey Women's Prize for Fiction that exist to

make up for a perceived deficit in recognition for a specific group or class. Anderson

adds that the tastes and preferences of women readers and publishers is inevitably

shaped by their education and that the established literary canon taught to most

graduates in the UK and North America likely features few female and non-white

voices, therefore identifying the academy as another potential gatekeeper. She

argues that women's writing is often excluded from 'serious' canonical writing (with a

few key exceptions such as Edith Wharton, Virginia Woolf and Jane Austen) and

instead frequently relegated to particular 'non-literary' genres, such as romance and

women's fiction. We can identify equivalent gatekeepers within the Hindi literary

sphere, be they publishers, reviewers and critics or awards bodies, which I discuss in

more detail shortly. To this we might add university education and its significance in

determining knowledge and shaping the standards of readers, publishers and critics

alike. Throughout this thesis, then, I ask how different gatekeepers have impacted

the Hindi literary sphere. Furthermore, I briefly consider in Chapters Two and Three

what it means for a minority literature, specifically Dalit literature in the Indian

context, to be often excluded from the wider Hindi and Indian canon and relegated its

own separate niche. By doing this, I demonstrate how gatekeepers motivated by

their own conscious and unconscious biases can marginalise the output of writers

from non-dominant backgrounds to a niche genre or minority literature.

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[32] Alison Anderson, 'Of Gatekeepers and Bedtime Stories: The Ongoing Struggle to Make Women's

Voices Heard', *World Literature Today*, Vol. 90. No. 6, (2016), pp. 11-15 (p. 13)

The most prominent gatekeeper I consider is the Sahitya Akademi, India's national ministry of letters whose stated mission is to promote Indian literature in the country's multiple languages. The scale of work that the Sahitya Akademi undertakes is immense, ranging from providing funding to writers in the form of grants, publication of its own material and granting the annual Sahitya Akademi Award to writers working in twenty-four selected Indian languages. The Akademi also operates its own library and bookshops. Considering the range of work that the Akademi undertakes and that the Sahitya Akademi Award is the best-known and biggest award in India given to writers working in vernacular languages, it is unsurprising that the Akademi is a major gatekeeper within the sphere of Hindi literature and vernacular literature generally. The Akademi can be seen to replicate biases that exist more widely in Indian society and politics, for example the limited recognition for work produced by low-caste, non-Brahmin and non-Hindu writers and artists. Despite the fact that some of the most renowned Hindi writers since 1947 originate from non-Hindu and non-upper caste backgrounds, including Rahi Masoom Raza, Omprakash Valmiki, Rajendra Yadav and Phanishwar Nath 'Renu', the winners of the Sahitya Akademi award for Hindi have uniformly been of upper-caste Hindu backgrounds. This speaks to the fact that the Akademi has failed to recognise the literary achievements of non-Hindu and non-high caste Hindi writers at the same level as their Hindu, high-caste peers as well as to the difficulty that Indian Dalit and Muslim writers in particular face in trying to achieve national and official recognition working in Hindi.

The three writers whose work I consider all originate from Hindu and non-Dalit backgrounds yet have differing levels of solidarity with their Dalit and non-Hindu peers. They have all received official recognition from the Sahitya Akademi: in 1985, Nirmal Verma won the Sahitya Akademi Award for Hindi for *Kavve aur kālā pānī*, Uday Prakash won the same prize in 2010 for *Mohan dāsa* and while Geetanjali Shree did not win the Sahitya Akademi Award when *Maī* was first published, Nita Kumar's English translation won the Award in 2002 for a Hindi work translated into English. This is an initial indication that Verma, Shree and Prakash have received validation from a prominent gatekeeper in the world of Hindi letters. However, as I explore in the following chapters, all three have had different responses to the recognition and attention that their work has generated shaped by their own politics and ideologies. By considering their responses I illustrate the way that Hindi writers, particularly those from socially dominant backgrounds, interact with official gatekeepers within the national literary sphere and how this in turn affects the marketability and translatability of their work.

In addition to the Sahitya Akademi, other gatekeepers in the contemporary Hindi literary landscape whose role I consider include award institutions such as the DSC Prize, JCB Prize and Crossword Prize, all of which are awarded for work written in or translated into English. Though both Uday Prakash and Geetanjali Shree have garnered nominations from the DSC and Crossword Prize respectively, these have only come after their work has been translated and published in English. The financial capital associated with such awards is significant: the DSC Prize awards a $25,000 prize for the winner. This was the largest cash prize available exclusively to

Indian writers until it was unseated by the JCB Prize in 2018, which promises a hefty annual $38,400 prize for its winner.

The fact that the DSC, Crossword and JCB Prizes all accept works written in vernacular languages once they have been translated into English demonstrates the intersection between the cultural capital of writing in, or being translated into, English and the financial capital available upon translation. One intriguing difference between the DSC and JCB Prizes however is each organisation's distribution of the prize money. The DSC splits prize money evenly between translator and writer as does the International Booker Prize, giving according to Deborah Smith, 'equal recognition to writer and translator'.[33] The JCB Prize meanwhile gives the 'winning author … Rs 25 lakh' followed by 'an additional Rs 10 lakh … to the translator if the winning work is a translation'.[34] This distinction is striking as it refutes the assumption that writer and translator *deserve* 'equal recognition'. By giving the author of an original vernacular text a greater share of the prize money than their translator, the JCB Prize is making a value judgement and an implicit assertion that the work of the original author supersedes the work of the translator in its importance. This value judgement also articulates an unconscious nationalistic sentiment: a vernacular writer who wins the JCB Prize is certain to be an Indian (the Prize is limited to India whereas the DSC Prize is available to South Asian writers generally and even non-

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[33] Deborah Smith, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Translation* (2018) https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/what-we-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-translation/ [accessed 15 October 2019]

[34] https://www.thejcbprize.org/about-the-prize [accessed 25 August 2019]

South Asians writing about the subcontinent) however their translator may be from anywhere in the world. By granting the original author the bigger share of the prize money, the JCB Prize counters the imbalance in social and cultural capital that might exist between a non-Western author and Western translator.

It is notable that the JCB Prize was instituted in 2018 whereas the DSC began in 2010; the JCB's greater focus on translations may thus be a result of the growing commercial and critical success of translations in the intervening years. This is exemplified by the relationship of writers such as Vivek Shanbhag and K.R. Meera (working in Kannada and Malayalam respectively) with the JCB Prize. Shanbhag and Meera were both part of the 2010s wave of vernacular writers achieving success in translation with their respective novels *Ghachar Ghochar* (2015) and *Hangwoman* (2015). Following this success, Shanbhag went on to sit on the 2018 jury and Meera the 2019 jury of the JCB Prize.[35] This demonstrates that vernacular writers who achieved the first wave of success in the 2010-2018 period are now acting as partial gatekeepers themselves, through participation in literary prize juries.

A similarity between the JCB and DSC prizes is their respective founders: the manufacturing and construction companies J.C. Bamford Excavators Limited and DSC Limited. In present-day, development-oriented India, it is striking to see the intersection between commerce, industry and art at play in the country's biggest literary awards. The coupling of industry and the arts is not a new phenomenon and

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[35] https://www.thejcbprize.org/#list [accessed 25 August 2019]

has indeed been a feature of both the literary and art worlds for several decades. As Graham Huggan notes, 'the corporate sponsorship of the arts has become an indisputable fact', particularly in the face of declining public sponsorship and funding worldwide.[36] The Booker Prize itself exemplifies this, having been sponsored by the company Booker McConnell Ltd from 1969 and funded by the Man Group for almost two decades from 2002 until 2019.[37] In his essay, Huggan problematises Booker McConnell's sponsorship, drawing attention to the company's colonial roots as an organisation 'provid[ing] distributional services on the sugar-estates of Demarara', which 'achieved rapid prosperity under a harsh colonial regime', a history that stands at its odds with its late twentieth century incarnation as a 'postcolonial literary patron'.[38]

Huggan expands on a possible reason for a company such as Booker McConnell to provide corporate sponsorship for a literary prize: 'the corporate prize … is a "gift" that brings publicity to the company while functioning as a symbolic marker of its authorizing power'.[39] Huggan notes the irony of the Booker's colonial origins juxtaposed with its postcolonial present but he does not delve too deeply into the

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[36] Graham Huggan, 'Prizing "Otherness": A Short History of the Booker', *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (1997), pp. 412-433 (p. 413)

[37] Victoria Ward, 'Man Booker Prize could change name after losing hedge fund sponsor', *The Telegraph*, 27 January 2019 https://www.telegraph.co.uk/books/news/man-booker-prize-could-change-name-losing-hedge-fund-sponsor/ [accessed 13 September 2019]

[38] Graham Huggan, 'Prizing "Otherness": A Short History of the Booker', p. 414-15

[39] Ibid, p. 413-414

benefits that literary patronage can offer a company such as Booker McConnell. I would argue the ironic fact of the company's colonial past may account for its mission in the present, which, purposeful or not, has been to promote a globalised and multicultural understanding of modern literature to readers and critics alike. Through patronage of the arts, a company such as Booker McConnell can attempt a rehabilitation of sorts of its public image and reputation; a strategy that is employed by high-profile corporations in many fields and has most recently ignited controversy in the art world.[40] It is possible that industrial companies such as J.C. Bamford and DSC Limited might be operating similar strategies through their sponsorship of Indian literature. Their endeavours to bring attention and funding to Indian writers in turn brings good publicity for both companies and, in an era of rapid development where Indian companies face accusations of environmental degradation and human rights abuses, staves off potential bad publicity that both companies' industrial work might attract. [41]

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[40] See: Hannah Black, Ciarán Finlayson, and Tobi Haslett, 'Tear Gas Biennial', *Artforum*, 17 July 2019 https://www.artforum.com/slant/a-statement-from-hannah-black-ciaran-finlayson-and-tobi-haslett-on-warren-kanders-and-the-2019-whitney-biennial-80328 [accessed 13 September 2019]

[41] See: Elena Moya, 'Vedanta investors look into human rights issues in India', *The Guardian*, 6 September 2010, https://www.theguardian.com/business/2010/sep/06/vedanta-human-rights-issues-india

As Sarah Brouillette points out in *Literature and the Creative Economy*, it is not uncommon for culture to be folded into political governance.[42] Brouillette's study focuses particularly on the 'incorporation of culture into governance' in the context of New Labour Britain; however, the conceptual framework she provides is applicable to India as well. As Brouillette highlights, the 'creative economy' is an increasingly profitable and important part of the wider British economy.[43] This is true of India as well, where industries such as literature, music and film are both an important source of revenue as well as an effective form of soft power influence across the world. Brouillette adds that culture industries are often linked to initiatives for social diversity and inclusion.[44] We see such language demonstrated on the DSC Prize website, where the South Asian Literature Prize & Events Trust that administers the Prize is described as being 'focused on the quality of life in South Asian society' and seeing 'literature and education [as] crucial for the wellbeing of the people, and [to] help create opportunities that are required for life improvement'.[45] The linking of art with social mobility is partly what helps make the creative industries increasingly relevant to political governance, as they are perceived as helping to improve social integration and assimilation. Moreover, this means that when any form of subalternity is represented in literature or art, it acquires a greater significance than the simply literary as it can be repurposed in the political sphere as a public good that either

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[42] Sarah Brouillette, *Literature and the Creative Economy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), p. 1

[43] Ibid

[44] Ibid, p. 2

[45] http://dscprize.com/about/ [accessed 29 August 2019]

teaches about or reflects the life of the marginalised. This is particularly relevant to discussions of *Maī* and *Mohan dāsa*, which approach subalternity through the lens of gender and caste respectively, and I return to Brouillette's arguments in my second and third chapters.

In an era where the literary community and media celebrate occasions such as 'Women in Translation Month', it is easy for world literature in translation to be reduced to a banal and unexamined symbol of the latest literary marginality: in this case, marginality based on language, region and global North-South relations.[46] The biases of the world literary academic community, including the 'translatability assumption' that texts can travel seamlessly between the borders of culture and language that Apter identifies, make literature in translation irresistibly appealing in media, publishing and even political circles where it can be repurposed as a public good, that acts as a form of cultural exchange and can also hold up a mirror to subaltern lives in "foreign" lands. This thesis seeks to challenge these assumptions by drawing attention to those instances when meaning cannot successfully breach the border between one language and another and furthermore investigate how misunderstandings and misreadings can form a crucial part of the reception of translated literature. My alternative engagement with Hindi literature in translation makes room for readings of translated literature that grapple with instance of 'untranslatability' when they occur as well the 'translation zone' that arises between

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[46] Sana Goyal, '11 Books You Should Read for "Women in Translation Month"', *Huffington Post India,* 14 August 2019 https://www.huffingtonpost.in/entry/11-books-for-women-in-translation-month_in_ [accessed 15 September 2019]

the original text and its varying translations. The critical value of this is it allows us to

see translation as an act complicated by personal choices, subjectivities and

ideologies, rather than a 'public good', which in turn allows us to evaluate both the

strengths and weaknesses of individual translations and their relationship to the

original text more effectively.

Methodology and Structure of Chapters

Each case study chapter situates each of the three authors in the contemporary

Hindi literary landscape, contextualising the author within their historical moment and

reflecting on how the reception of their work was shaped by these forces. close

reading of the English translation, evaluating the specific strategies used by each

translator and considering what is lost and alternatively what is gained in translation.

Here I discuss in detail the original three Hindi texts (*Kavve aur kālā pānī*, *Maī* and

Mohan dāsa) and the accompanying English translations ('Deliverance' from *The

Crows of Deliverance*, *Mai: Silently Mother* and 'Mohan dāsa' from *Three Walls of

Delhi*). When quoting in the English language I will be referring to the translations

produced by Ratan and Singh, Kumar and Grunebaum, unless otherwise specified.

When conducting close reading analyses of each translation, however, I quote from

the Hindi original text and the English translation in parallel in order to draw attention

to certain linguistic choices in the translation. When discussing individual word

choices and phrasing, I transliterate the Hindi words using the transliteration rules

laid out by the Library of Congress. I also indicate where I use my own translation,

typically to draw out the contrast with the existing English translations of Ratan,

Singh, Kumar and Grunebaum. The final section of each chapter evaluates how the

style and quality of each translation consequently impacts the text's reception both

within and outside of India, using non-fiction writings and author interviews in which

Verma, Prakash and Shree discuss their writing, politics, the Hindi literary sphere

more generally and the sometimes-conflicted relationship between vernacular writing

and English-language readers. Where available, I also consider texts in which the

translators reflect on their own strategies and choices to facilitate my close reading

of their English translations.[47] Through these close readings and consideration of the

translators' own commentary, I seek to illustrate the personal subjectivities and

ideologies that shaped Ratan, Singh, Kumar and Grunebaum's translations and in

turn impacted the reception of these texts in English.

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[47] This is the case with Kumar and Grunebaum; no commentaries by Ratan and Singh are

available to my knowledge.

Chapter 1. Nirmal Verma's *Kavve aur kālā pānī* (1984)

Nirmal Verma (1929-2005) was a towering figure in the post-independence Hindi literary canon, credited as one of the pioneers of the 'Nayi Kahani' literary movement of the 1960s and 1970s. 'Nayi Kahani' literally means a 'new story' in Hindi, indicating that this movement represented a shift from the literature that had preceded it. Similar movements were taking place simultaneously in other linguistic and regional spheres, such as 'Nutan Sahitya' (a 'new literature') in Bengali.[48] In Hindi this new literary movement, whose practitioners included Bhisham Sahni, Mohan Rakesh, Rajendra Yadav, Mannu Bhandari and Kamleshwar alongside Verma, emerged in the late 1950s, and was credited with dealing with new themes that rose in an urbanising, modernising India, including rural-to-urban migration, urban alienation, the changing role of women and the disintegration of the joint family. The 'Nayi Kahani' movement was an important turning point in late twentieth century Hindi literature. It is evident that both the generation and reception of Verma's work in English is shaped by his iconic status within the Hindi canon.

Of the three writers considered, Verma has been most translated and by different translators. The best known translations are Jai Ratan and Kuldip Singh's early anthologies of Verma's short stories *The World Elsewhere: And Other Stories* (Readers International, 1988) and *The Crows of Deliverance* (Readers International, 1991), Kuldip Singh's translation of a Verma novella *The Red Tin Roof* (Ravi Dayal

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[48] Mrinal Sen, *Montage*, 2nd edition (London, New York, Calcutta: Seagull Books), p. 51

Publisher, 1997) and most recently Hindi writer Krishna Baldev Vaid's translation of another Verma novella *Days of Longing* (Penguin, 2013). These efforts, particularly as they have largely been conducted by Indian writers, translators and publishing companies such as Penguin's Indian imprint, are evidence of a mission to introduce Verma and his work to English-language readers and to help posit Verma as a crucial part of not only the Hindi canon but of the national Indian canon as well. In this chapter, I consider one of the earliest attempts to introduce Verma's work to English-language audiences, Jai Ratan and Kuldip Singh's translation *The Crows of Deliverance* (1991). *The Crows of Deliverance* makes for a compelling case study partly because Ratan and Singh's translation is relatively poor and has received criticism from both its contemporary critics and from present-day readers. In examining the reception of *The Crows of Deliverance*, we see how poor-quality translations can stymie the reception of vernacular Indian writers amongst non-Indian readers and consequently what this means for the recognition of canonically important vernacular literature on the international stage. In addition to this, 'Kavve aur kālā pānī' demonstrates how untranslatability can arise as a result of misreading and misunderstanding in a poor-quality translation and how this in turn impacts the literary value assigned to a text.

India during the Cold War era: Verma's political and literary context

During the Cold War period, India was famously a non-aligned actor. Its policy of non-alignment was one reflected not only in the politics of the period but also in its

art and culture.[49] Indian writers' affinity with leftist politics, particularly in the early

twentieth century and post-Independence period, is most obviously exemplified in

the development of the Progressive Writers' Association (PWA), established in 1936

by the Marxist Urdu writer Sajjad Zaheer. The PWA was interested not only in class

struggle within India but also the international struggle against colonialism. In the

PWA's first manifesto, they denounced colonialist actions including Italian incursions

into Ethiopia, Japan's attack against China and unsurprisingly, the actions of the

British Government in India. [50] Chronicling the history of the PWA upon its fiftieth

anniversary, Hindi writer and Verma's fellow 'Naya Kahani' pioneer Bhisham Sahni

notes that the first three decades of the twentieth century produced an abundance of

writers working in India's many vernacular languages, including the likes of

Rabindranath Tagore and Muhummad Iqbal, who 'sang of freedom, of the

rejuvenation of an ancient society'.[51] Of the PWA's first conference Sahni writes, 'the

social orientation in literature was further defined and so was the role of the writer:

that the writer was not merely a detached observer of life's drama but also an active

participant in it on the side of struggling humanity'.[52] The leftist principles of Indian

writers in the early-to-mid twentieth century had a deep impact upon their later

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[49] On Indian non-alignment, see: Rajen Harshe, 'Indian's Non-Alignment: An Attempt at Conceptual

Reconstruction', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 25 No. 7/8, (1990), pp. 399-405

[50] Hafeez Malik, 'The Marxist Literary Movement in India and Pakistan', *The Journal of Asian Studies,*

Vol. 26 No. 4, (1967), pp. 649-664 (p. 651)

[51] Bhisham Sahni, 'The Progressive Writers' Movement', *Indian Literature*, Vol. 29 No. 6, (1986), pp.

178-183 (p. 180)

[52] Ibid

successors, including Verma who joined the Communist Party of India (CPI) as a
student.[53]

By the 1970s however, the affinity between left-wing politics and Indian writers had
diminished considerably. K.N. Pannikar cites the belligerent and undemocratic
attitudes of leftist political organisations towards artistic communities as a key reason
for this deterioration, as well as a national decline of leftist politics in India.[54] Verma
too would become disillusioned with both communism and leftist politics more
broadly, following the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary. In light of the anti-colonialist
principles championed by the Indian left, it is unsurprising that this act was seen as a
betrayal and led to Verma's renunciation of the CPI.[55] Nonetheless, when the
Oriental Institute in Prague invited Verma to Czechoslovakia to translate modern
Czech literature in 1959 he accepted and moved to Prague, where he lived for close
to a decade. Yet the years spent in Prague did not bring Verma back into the
communist fold but disheartened him further from both socialism as well as
communism. Witnessing 'the acute poverty … intellectual censorship [and]
dishonesties of realpolitik' led Verma to declare: 'I went there as a socialist, but when

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[53] Pavla Horakova, *Hindi writer, translator of Czech modern writers, Nirmal Verma passes away*
(2005) https://www.radio.cz/en/section/curraffrs/hindi-writer-translator-of-czech-modern-writers-nirmal-
verma-passes-away [accessed 3 August 2018]

[54] K N Panikkar, 'Progressive Cultural Movement in India: A Critical Appraisal', *Social Scientist*, Vol.
39. No. 11/12, (2011), pp. 14-25 (p. 21)

[55] Shoma Chaudhury, *Alone with Solitude* (200),
https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/pwa_story_first/209123 [accessed 2 August 2018]

I saw the deformities in the so-called socialist state, I was compelled to think of other

alternatives for post-Independence India'.[56] According to journalist Shoma

Chaudhury in a 2000 profile, this 'alternative' would be 'less a political model' and

more a 'liberal, humanist view'; one 'shaped … by Verma's 'European experience''.[57]

I highlight Verma's changing politics here in order to better understand the impact of

political ideology on late twentieth and early twenty-first Hindi writers generally.

"Ideology" itself is a contested term. John Gerring highlights the contradictions

implicit in the term: 'to some, ideology is dogmatic, while to others it carries

connotations of political sophistication … to some it is based in the concrete interests

of a social class, while to others it is characterized by an absence of economic self-

interest'.[58] The dominant ideology of early twentieth century Indian writers was

effectively summarised by Sahni upon the fiftieth anniversary of the PWA: it was a

collective ideology that saw writers as active participants in India's myriad social

struggles regardless of their own economic self-interest. It is unsurprising therefore

that vernacular literature in the early twentieth century was often concerned with

various kinds of social struggle between different classes and groups, from the

nationalist movement represented in Rabindranath Tagore's *Ghare Baire* (1916) to

the plight of the rural poor in Munshi Premchand's *Godan* (1936). By contrast the

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[56] Ibid

[57] Ibid

[58] John Gerring, 'Ideology: A Definitional Analysis', *Political Research Quarterly,* Vol. 50. No. 4,
(1997), pp. 957-994, p. 957

'Nayi Kahani' movement was more concerned with the 'inner realities of human experience'.[59] This new generation's main themes were individualistic, including 'disintegration in middle class families, erosion of values, melancholy, loneliness, and anxiety'.[60] This shift has often been attributed to the influence of European writers as well as to the changing face of Indian society in the post-Independence period but it also reflects the changing political allegiances and ideologies between one generation and the next. It is unsurprising that the generation of writers, from the 1920s until the 1950s, most deeply influenced by Marxist ideology would also produce fictional representations of India that were collectivist in nature, illustrating the conflict between groups such as landlords and peasants. Yet as affiliation with Marxist politics diminished and Indian society and politics shifted in the 1960s and 1970s, it is similarly unsurprising that the era's fiction would be inward-looking and focused more broadly on the individual.

Nirmal Verma's 'Kavve aur kālā pānī'

Kavve aur kālā pānī was Verma's fourth short story collection and the first to garner him a Sahitya Akademi Award in 1985. The eponymous story 'Kavve aur kālā pānī' is recounted by a newspaper journalist from Delhi who travels to a mountainous region where his estranged older brother has taken up the life of a *sanyasi* (a Hindu

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[59] Madhu Singh, 'Altered Realities, New Experiences: Bhisham Sahni, Nirmal Verma, and the "Nayi Kahani" Movement', *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 53. No. 2, (2016), pp. 312-333

[60] Ibid

ascetic who has renounced material life for a spiritual one) following the death of their father. The narrator's purpose is to obtain his brother's signatures for some paperwork so that the family home can be sold. This is following a letter from the eldest brother; the first contact made ten years after his disappearance. Throughout the story, the narrator is plagued with questions regarding his brother's choice to leave his family behind and cease contact with them. Towards the end of the story, he is briefly able to ask his brother the reason for his departure, euphemistically saying, 'what was the point then in … in your change of address?'.[61] His brother responds saying, 'Over there, I did not matter to anyone' and 'here [in the mountains] there is no one to whom I should care if I mattered'.[62] When the narrator asks if it is possible 'to give up your own people', his brother responds that it is not possible and this in fact was partly what compelled him to write to the narrator.[63]

Though he appears to have assumed the life of an ascetic, the elder brother is still attached to the material life of his family. He interrogates the narrator regarding their third brother's choice to sell their joint family property in Dehradun, arguing that 'Father pumped all his savings and benefits into it'.[64] When the narrator acknowledges that this is true, but their father is now deceased, his brother responds

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[61] Nirmal Verma, *The Crows of Deliverance*, trans. by Kuldip Singh and Jai Ratan (London: Readers International, 1991), p. 179

[62] Ibid

[63] Ibid

[64] Ibid, p. 160

'still, how can his things cease to be his?'.[65] It is clear though never directly stated that the eldest brother was and remains deeply impacted by the death of their father. Their narrator responds to his questions with wonderment thinking, 'how come, having renounced the world, he was still concerned whether the house was sold or retained'.[66] At some points in the story, doubts are cast on the sincerity of his brother's ascetism. The narrator discusses his brother's spirituality with the village schoolteacher, the only other person with whom he interacts in the mountain village. The schoolteacher, who never states whether or not he knows the family link between the narrator and the village *sanyasi*, says the elder brother's behaviour is 'strange and discouraging'.[67] The schoolteacher recounts one incident: having asked the *sanyasi* about his devotion to and meditation on God, the *sanyasi* replied, 'How can you meditate upon One you know nothing about?'.[68] When the schoolteacher probes him more deeply, asking if this is the case why did the *sanyasi* leave his family for a self-imposed exile in the mountains, he replies 'I have left nothing; I only came away'.[69]

Later in the story, the elder brother is visited by pilgrims. The narrator listens from inside the house to 'fragments' of the pilgrims' conversation with his brother, but wonders, 'what did he [the brother] have to offer them? Why did they keep coming to

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[65] Ibid

[66] Ibid

[67] Ibid, p, 168

[68] Ibid, p. 169

[69] Ibid

him? Most certainly they got from him something about which I knew nothing'.[70]

When the *sanyasi* returns from conversing with the pilgrims, he finds the narrator

asleep and affectionately calls him '*chhote*' (little brother).[71] The story ends when

the narrator leaves the mountain town, almost forgetting to obtain the signature for

which he made the trip. His older brother reminds him and returns the signed papers,

despite his earlier objections.[72] There is a strong sense of bathos underpinning the

conclusion of the story. There is no dramatic revelation, concretely exposing the

elder brother's reasons for leaving his family, nor is there a reunion between the two

siblings. The narrator helplessly concludes, 'that's all; there's nothing left to say' as

he remembers his departure from the town. As he leaves, the schoolteacher asks 'if

the desire that had made [him] undertake the journey had been fulfilled'; a question

the narrator is unable to answer before his bus leaves the station.

The story is emblematic of Verma's writing generally. In an elegiac article

commenting on Verma's literary legacy, Geetanjali Shree recalls the impact that

Verma had upon Hindi writing generally as well as younger generations of Hindi

writers herself included. She characterises Verma's 'narrative strategy' as one that

'employ[s] fragments, incomplete and unclear' to give off 'tantalizing shadows all

around the well-defined images in [his] fiction'.[73] For Shree, 'interruption', 'silence'

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[70] Ibid, p. 180

[71] Ibid, p. 181

[72] Ibid, p. 183

[73] Geetanjali Shree, 'Nirmal Verma: A Personal Remembrance', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 40. No. 49, (2005), pp. 5149-5151 (p. 5150)

and 'absences' are all key in Verma's writing and it is around these gaps that readers must 'tiptoe' to 'receive [the] stories' and 'decode … the nuances'.[74] This is evident in 'Kavve aur kālā pānī', particularly in the dynamic between the two brothers and in the narrator's inability to communicate his most pressing questions to his brother. The narrator ponders the gulf that has grown between himself and his brother and there are some paragraphs in the text comprised entirely of his inner questions:

> What was the point of staying on in town if we had to spend the night under different roofs? Why did all of us, my brothers and sisters, dry up like wilted stalks at the moment of reckoning? How was it that at a certain point all our love doused itself in sand and ashes? How could we leave one another to his or her fate and stand aloof? Wasn't it the tyranny of this sinful indifference which had driven him from home?[75]

To these multiple questions the narrator is not able to formulate a satisfactory answer, just as he is speechless in the face of the schoolteacher's final weighty question. Readers are left to 'decode' the absence of answers provided by the narrator, as well as the tantalising but ultimately unsatisfactory answers given by the eldest brother to the few questions the narrator does pose to him.

Shree discusses the influence of European literature upon Verma and the extent this influence shaped Verma's writing and thinking. According to Shree, in the early

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[74] Ibid

[75] *The Crows of Deliverance*, p. 166

phase of Verma's career he was accused by critics of having a having a 'western' frame of reference and of 'writ[ing] in translation' while writing in Hindi.[76] This sentiment is not uncommon even amongst newer critics of Verma's writing. Prasenjit Gupta echoes Shree, citing the influence of European and U.S. fiction on Verma and noting that 'it might be argued that [Verma] writes in a translated manner about transplanted men'.[77] Gupta's characterisation of the influence of European thought and writing on Verma is somewhat hollow. He writes that 'the "translation" of European modes of writing is more than simple borrowing' suggesting that Verma's thematic preoccupations and style of writing are equivalent to a 'translation' of European concepts and stylistic choices into a Hindi context.[78] Gupta goes on to pose the question:

> …if Verma's work is ("merely") a rehearsal of European existentialism with non-European protagonists, why bother to translate it into English? There is plenty of such fiction already available in English; why add Verma? When the "original" already exists, why bother with the translation of an "imitation"?[79]

It seems to Gupta, Verma's accomplishment was not to explore the inner realities of Indians in the rapidly shifting society of post-Independence India, but instead to bring

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[76] 'Nirmal Verma: A Personal Remembrance', p. 5149

[77] Prasenjit Gupta, 'Refusing the Gaze: Identity and Translation in Nirmal Verma's Fiction', *World Literature Today*, Vol. 74. No. 1, (2000), pp. 53-59 (p. 53)

[78] Ibid, p. 53

[79] Ibid, p. 56

"home" the existential angst of Europeans to Indian audiences by writing about them in Hindi.

It is difficult to call the themes of family estrangement, alienation and loneliness in the story merely a 'rehearsal of European existentialism with non-European protagonists' as Gupta does. Verma himself pointed out that 'the loneliness or the solitariness of an Indian *sanyasi* living in the mountains is very different from the loneliness of an individual in Paris, or even the loneliness of an individual in India living in a big city like Bombay is very different in its entire texture than a very individuated feeling of anguish and loneliness of a person living in New York'.[80] The themes that Verma explores in this story are embedded in an Indian context, whether it is the solitude of the eldest brother's life once he becomes a *sanyasi* or the breakdown of the joint family, represented by the eldest brother's initial departure, and heightened by the prospect of the sale of the joint family property. It would be inaccurate to claim that there exists a European 'original' of this story, and that the Hindi text is simply a 'translation' or 'imitation'.

In order to examine the prevailing view of Verma's work as somehow 'translated' from European literature and modes of thinking, we can consider Verma's own writing on Indian modernism as well as critical studies of Indian modernism beyond the Hindi literary sphere. Discussing the bilingual poet Arun Kolatkar, whose career was largely based in the Marathi and Anglophone literary spheres of Mumbai,

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[80] 'Altered Realities, New Experiences'

Laetitia Zecchini points out that modernism was considered to be a product of Western influence and culture and as a result, Indian writers working across all languages were 'criticised for being over-westernized and 'un-Indian'.[81] She adds that just as Western modernism was shaped by the colonial project so too was Indian modernism impacted both by the colonial encounter and the decolonisation process; Kolatkar's poetry is therefore 'inseparable from – although not equivalent to – so-called Euro-American modernism'.[82] I highlight Zecchini's comments here as they are deeply relevant to Verma's own engagement with the concept of modernity, despite the fact that Verma and Kolatkar were working in different mediums as well as distinct regional and linguistic spheres. It is immediately apparent, for example, that Verma like Kolatkar was considered to be 'over-westernized and 'un-Indian'' by his most vocal critics. Yet Verma was both deeply influenced by, whilst also being critical of, European thinkers and writers and this contradiction is inherent in his engagement with modernity. Zecchini writes 'there is no such thing as a category that would correspond to 'our' culture divorced from 'theirs', a 'self' that could be entirely retrievable from the other'.[83] It is precisely this sense of 'inseparability' from Euro-American modernism, partly as a condition of colonialism, that informs Verma's own thinking regarding modernity, the Indian psyche and India's historic relationship with Europe.

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[81] Laetitia Zecchini, *Arun Kolatkar and Literary Modernism in India* (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 9

[82] Ibid, p. 17

[83] Ibid, p. 18

In his lecture 'India and Europe: The Self and the Other', Verma launches a critique against what he perceives as the divided European sense of self:

> … the European notion of the 'other' [is] an inalienable entity external to oneself, both a source of terror and an object of desire. Sartre's famous statement, "Hell is the other", carries a strong echo of Hegel, who always defines one's identity as "identity against the other, either to be appropriated or to be destroyed". But here, as I point out elsewhere, the European man gets himself entrapped in his own contradiction; if he succeeds in completely subjugating the 'other', the identity of his own self becomes dubious. He wants to become whole by destroying the other; but without the other, he becomes nothing.[84]

This contrasts with what constitutes an Indian sense of self in Verma's eyes. Verma makes it clear that by 'Indian' he is specifically referring to Hindu Indians and Hindu Indian history in his lecture, perhaps conforming to 'the symmetrically opposite *colonial*, Orientalist and to a certain extent nationalist equation between Indianness and high culture (ancient, Brahmanical, Sanskritic, Vedic)' to which Zecchini draws our attention.[85] For 'Indians', Verma writes 'the 'other' was never a source of reference to define their own identity … The 'self' was always accepted as self-referential; the 'other' was neither a threat to their identity, nor a source of

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[84] Nirmal Verma, 'India and Europe: The Self and Other', *India International Centre Quarterly,* Vol. 20. No. 1/2, (1993), pp. 137-164 (p. 139)

[85] *Arun Kolatkar and Literary Modernism in India*, p. 18

confirmation of their uniqueness'.[86] Furthermore, there is a clear association made between European 'crass materialism' and a simultaneous 'spiritual vacuity' in Verma's eyes.[87] He quotes nineteenth century Hindu intellectual Swami Vivekananda's 'vivid, though slightly exaggerated' description of European colonisers as being 'intoxicated by the heady wine of newly acquired power … slaves to women, insane in their lust … materialistic, grabbing other people's territory and wealth by hook or by crook, without any faith in life to come'.[88]

It is evident from this lecture that Verma perceives European existential dread as being rooted in qualities and experiences unique to Europeans and not shared by Indians. Consequently it is not right to suggest, as Gupta and many of Verma's contemporary critics have done, that the condition of Verma's 'transplanted men' is a mimicry of the same condition explored by European intellectuals and writers. As with Kolatkar, Verma's understanding of modernity is inseparable from Euro-American modernism without being equivalent to it. Rather Verma considers at length the impact of European colonisation on Indian consciousness and consequently the Indian sense of self:

> The cleavage caused in the Hindu psyche by her 'encounter' with Europe was
> thus like a crack in the mirror, one part reflecting the glorified image of the
> past lost for ever, the other reflecting a caricatured image of Europe, which

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[86] 'India and Europe: The Self and Other', p. 139

[87] Ibid, p. 153

[88] Ibid, p. 143

was to serve its 'model' that was never to be realised. The Indian
'renaissance' was both a reflection of the Hindu consciousness of the 'self' as
well as its estrangement from it.[89]

To Verma, like to many other Indian writers and intellectuals of the postcolonial
period, the colonial encounter presented a deep challenge to the Indian sense of
self, but it would be inaccurate to suggest that the result of this was that Indian
intellectuals began simply to imitate European behaviours and aspire to an European
understanding of self. Verma delineates the struggle of Indian intellectuals in the
nineteenth and early twentieth century to both learn from European cultural and
critical traditions, while at the same time rejecting them. He writes of the propagators
of the Bengali literary Renaissance, including both 'orthodox traditional pundits like
Bhudev Mukhopadhya and Radhanat Dev to the most westernised scholars like Raja
Rammohan Roy and Devendranath Tagore … [that] they were brilliant luminaries in
the intellectual firmament trying to define the nature of Indian 'selfhood' both *in terms
of European categories of thought as well as in defiance of it* [emphasis mine]'.[90]
Based on the arguments put forward in 'India and Europe: The Self and The Other' it
is evident that for Verma, an Indian concept of the self was not explicitly borrowed
from the West but was in response to unalienable facts of India's encounter with the
West, most obviously British colonialism. The problem of identity, as Verma saw it
experienced by Indians, was a 'self-estrangement' that occurred as a result of
European colonialism, which trapped 'Indian modernisers … in a condition from

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[89] Ibid, p. 156

[90] Ibid, p. 146

which they could never escape; uprooted from their tradition, they had to seek for a rejuvenation of the 'self' only in Europe, as it were, thus making the surrender the self itself, which they sought to rejuvenate'.[91] This is a much more considered analysis of the psychological crises experienced by the 'transplanted men' of Verma's stories than the analysis offered perfunctorily by Gupta; that Verma is simply 'rehears[ing]' European existential angst when he writes about isolated and unhappy Indian characters in his fiction.

How does this understanding of Verma's thoughts on the subjects of modernity, the Indian self and the colonial encounter, relate to a reading of 'Kavve aur kālā pānī'? In the short story, we see a character who abandons his family to return to a more traditional Hindu life. In 'India and Europe: The Self and the Other', Verma points out that 'the language of reason evolved by European man fails to provide any key or clue to communicate with [the] vast, living, mysterious 'non-human' world'.[92] In his retreat from a material life in order to become a *sanyasi*, the elder brother of the story may be showing an interest in communicating or connecting with the 'vast, living, mysterious 'non-human' world' that is harder to grasp living in a Westernised metropolis such as Delhi, where the rest of his family continue to live, and continue to be entangled in material affairs such as the sale of their father's property.

This sense of discrepancy between two selves existing in the same uneasy physical space - one Westernised, the other more closely aligned to a traditional Hindu sense

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[91] Ibid

[92] Ibid, p. 160

of self - is evident in the Hindi original of the text partly through Verma's skilful use of language, particularly those moments when English is used in the original. Verma's choice to situate the family in Delhi is not random or coincidental. He spent the majority of his life in Delhi, a city that represents one of the many contradictions of Indian urban life having become increasingly Westernised in the years since Independence while continuing to also be a centre of Hindi literature and culture.[93] Verma was a graduate from one of the city's most prestigious institutions, St. Stephen's College, widely travelled and fluent in English, Hindi and Czech, the latter as a result of his experience as a translator in Prague. It is unsurprising then that Verma is particularly effective at representing the different ways in which Hindi and English are used as languages by middle-class, educated Indians in his stories, including 'Kavve aur kālā pānī'. Considering his fluency in European languages and time spent abroad, what is surprising is that Verma committed to forging his literary career in Hindi, given the greater financial rewards that might have beckoned had he chosen English. In 'Refusing the Gaze', Verma claims: 'I can say that Hindi related to my social situation … Hindi, as a suffering language, brought me into contact with a suffering humanity: a language which itself was deprived of any official patronage brought me into contact with the people deprived of so many rights'.[94] While this claim is contested by Shree and Prakash given their interest in more minor North

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[93] See: Urvashi Butalia, *Gandhi, meet Pepsi: Western culture is sweeping India. Urvashi Butalia, a Delhi publisher, says that few can resist its power* (1994) https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/gandhi-meet-pepsi-western-culture-is-sweeping-india-urvashi-butalia-a-delhi-publisher-says-that-few-1369124.html [accessed 10 August 2018]

[94] Ibid, p. 56-7

Indian languages and dialects, Verma's understanding of Hindi as a 'suffering language' without 'official patronage' is closer to Moretti's designation of Hindi as a 'peripheral language' within the world system of languages. Given the history of communal and caste exclusion that I highlighted in my introductory chapter, and the undeniable patronage that Hindi has received since Independence from Indian institutions such as the Sahitya Akademi, Verma's desire to cast Hindi into the status of a victimised or marginalised language is suspect. It perhaps reflects the rightward shift of his politics in the later years of his life but also potentially reflects Hindi's status on the global, rather than the national, stage.

Gupta reinforces this in his discussion of translation, which he argues is an act of 'political resistance' as much as it is a 'literary act'.[95] He states that 'in choosing the text to be translated out of a politically weak language (such as Hindi) into a strong language (such as English), political resistance should seek to challenge easy stereotyping, should seek to *resist expectations* on the part of the Western reader'.[96] He recommends that this can be done by translating texts that both 'underline the *differences* between the source culture and the target culture' as well as 'underline the *similarities*'.[97] Such texts will necessarily '*complicate* the (Western) target culture's image of the source culture'.[98] To Gupta, a legitimate '*political* reason for translating Verma into English' lies in the ability of Verma's fiction to 'resist

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[95] 'Refusing the Gaze: Identity and Translation in Nirmal Verma's Fiction', p. 57

[96] Ibid

[97] Ibid

[98] Ibid

expectations of Hindi fiction as only depicting the "exotic Indian" face of the source

culture and thereby underline some similarities of experience and existence in

source and target cultures'.[99]

In many ways 'Kavve aur kālā pānī' is a story that does just this: if viewed through an

essentialist lens, one can see that it represents the differences between Indian and

Western culture through characteristically Eastern elements, such as the eldest

brother who withdraws from modern life to become a holy man, or the breakdown of

the tightly knit joint family structure. At the same time, the story emphasises the

similarities between both cultures in the form of shared experiences, such as

individuals experiencing isolation in urban centres and estrangement between family

members. Nonetheless I would resist Gupta's framing of translation as an act of

political resistance. The effect of this framing is that Verma's work becomes

significant only in so much as it can "teach" a Western audience, to recognise how

Indians are different, but also similar, to them. This view of translation conforms to

the perception of translation that Emily Apter draws our attention to in *Against World

Literature*: a public good that helps readers across different cultures and languages

understand each other through translation as effortless 'border-crossing'. While I

would not agree with Gupta's understanding of translation, it is still helpful to us as

readers and critics. It demonstrates the extent to which translation, like writing, is an

ideological practice and can be informed by a translator's ideological sympathies and

position taking, for example the postcolonial perspective Gupta brings to his

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[99] Ibid

understanding of the practice. In the next section, I contextualise the publishing and literary world in which the translation of 'Kavve aur kālā pānī' ('Deliverance' from *The Crows of Deliverance*) was produced and how the translators' choices ultimately impacted the reception of Verma's writing in the Anglosphere.

The Crows of Deliverance: Publishing and Translation Context

Both *The Crows of Deliverance* and the other existing translated anthology of Verma's short stories *The World Elsewhere* have been published by Readers International (RI); a publishing house founded in the United States that is currently registered in both the US and the UK.[100] Readers International's mission is clearly stated on the book jacket of *Crows of Deliverance*: '(RI) publishes contemporary literature of quality from Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Central and Eastern Europe, featuring especially works that have suffered political censorship or were written in exile'.[101] From this we can conclude that the mission of Readers International is as much political as it is aesthetic, bringing it closer in its aims to an activist press such as Kali for Women that published the translation of Shree's *Maī* than an institutional press such as University of Western Australia (UWA) Press that published the translation of Prakash's *Mohan dāsa*. The globalist or 'international' coverage that Readers International offers largely maps those regions that might be considered 'marginal' in the literary Anglosphere.

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[100] http://readersinternational.org/about-contact [accessed 4 August 2018]

[101] *Crows of Deliverance*, book jacket

However, unlike a publishing house such as Penguin India, Readers International does not specialise in any particular third or second-world region but offers a broad selection of texts from Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa instead.

The generalist nature of RI's mission can be glimpsed further in the other titles the company offers from Asia, also listed on the book jacket of *Crows of Deliverance*. Each writer's country of origin is helpfully provided in parenthesis: Lu Wenfu's *The Gourmet and Other Stories* (China), Kenzaburo Oe, ed., *Fire from the Ashes: Stories on Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (Japan), Linda Ty-Casper, *Awaiting Trespass* (novel, Philippines), Linda Ty-Casper, *Wings of Stone* (novel, Philippines), Nirmal Verma, *The World Elsewhere* (stories, India), Nirmal Verma, *The Crows of Deliverance* (stories, India), Hwang Sun-won, *The Book of Masks* (stories, South Korea), Yun Heung-gil, *The House of Twilight* (stories, South Korea).[102] It does not appear as though Readers International offers more than two translations from any particular country (their website only provides Wenfu and Ty-Casper's titles as part of their Asian list).[103] Once again, this suggests that the publishing house is interested in providing a general breadth of 'world' literature without plumbing into the specific depths of any culture's literary history or language's canon. In this context, it is not surprising then that Ratan and Singh's translation is merely serviceable and the subtler nuances of Verma's work are elided in their translation.

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[102] Ibid

[103] See: http://readersinternational.org/books#asian [accessed 4 August 2018]

In terms of the translation itself, there is a lack of material available regarding the process of translation or about the translators' choices and strategies. Unlike *Mai: Silently Mother* and *The Three Walls of Delhi*, which feature paratextual elements including epilogues from both Kumar and Grunebaum that detail their translation processes, there are no similar paratextual interventions in *The Crows of Deliverance* that might give readers an insight into Ratan and Singh's process. This is to the extent that it is unclear whether all the translations of *The Crows of Deliverance* were co-produced by Ratan and Singh or if some were produced by Ratan and others by Singh or even if Singh revised earlier translations produced by Jai Ratan. In the light of the fact that both Jai Ratan and Kuldip Singh have typically worked as independent translators and only appear to have collaborated on the two Nirmal Verma anthologies published by Readers International, the last two possibilities are most plausible: either Singh collected and edited translations produced by Ratan or some stories in the collection are translated by Singh and others by Ratan. The lack of information available regarding this is indicative of several things: firstly, a lack of interest from either the translators or Readers International (or possibly, both parties) to clearly delineate the roles performed by Ratan and Singh for readers' and critics' elucidation and second that the role of the translator in 1991, when *The Crows of Deliverance* was published, was radically different to the role of the translator today. For Readers International seeking to give American and British readers an insight into non-Western literature from a variety of sources, it is not surprising that the figure of the translator was not highlighted and took secondary importance to the writer. The lack of information about Ratan and Singh is likely not a purposeful decision but rather a reflection of RI's particular mission and priorities.

In an article for the Indian news website *scroll.in*, well-known translator Daisy

Rockwell assesses Jai Ratan's dubious legacy.[104] She notes that Ratan was the

twentieth century's 'most prolific translator of Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi' who 'claimed

to have translated over six hundred short stories and more than a dozen novels into

English'.[105] Regarding Ratan's ubiquity as a translator, Rockwell adds that 'up until

the last decade, practically any translation of Hindi literature into English that one

might find would have been done by him' and that he won a Sahitya Akademi award

for translation in 1992.[106] Yet Rockwell goes on to point out that Ratan's translations

'aren't very good' and are in fact a 'catastrophe': his translations see 'whole

passages and paragraphs … omitted; poems and songs are paraphrased rather than

translated; and sometimes, in a flight of fancy, he's felt moved to insert a few

sentences of his own creation'.[107] In the same article Rockwell goes on to praise

Kuldip Singh's translation of Verma's novel, *The Red Tin Roof*, lending further

credence to the theory that *The Crows of Deliverance* was perhaps simply edited by

Singh or Singh only contributed a few of the translations that make up the anthology.

Criticisms of Ratan and Singh's joint translations can be found amongst the

translation's contemporary reviews as well. In a review of *The World Elsewhere* in

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[104] Daisy Rockwell, *Five timeless translations to read, and what bad translations are* (2015),

https://scroll.in/article/743830/five-timeless-translations-to-read-and-what-bad-translations-are

[accessed 3 November 2019]

[105] Ibid

[106] Ibid

[107] Ibid

the *New York Times*, Carolyn See appraises Ratan and Singh's work harshly, calling

the stories 'inept translations … caught in the swinging doors of several national

idioms, so that finally the language balks … Poor Nirmal Verma, let down once again

– not just by the English but by the English language as well'.[108]

The reasons underpinning Ratan's poor quality translations are somewhat self-

evident. As Rockwell points out, though Ratan's 'passion was for translation' he was

a businessman by profession.[109] The variety of languages that Ratan worked across

may also account for the relative weaknesses of his translations as, unlike

translators such as Rockwell or Grunebaum who focus on Hindi literature

specifically, Ratan did not specialise in the movement of vernacular literature from

one particular language into English but was instead a generalist, working across

several different North Indian languages and scripts. What is most striking about

Ratan's presence as the twentieth century's most prolific translator is the stark

distinction it provides to translators today. The figure of the professionalised literary

translator, who may have graduated from a well-regarded MFA programme as

Grunebaum did or from a Translation Studies PhD as Deborah Smith did, was not

prevalent during the period in which Ratan was most active. The absence of

professionalised translators may also account for why Ratan was awarded the 1992

Sahitya Akademi award for translation – the award in this case less an indicator of

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[108] Carolyn See, *Shame in Shimla* (1998) https://www.nytimes.com/1988/08/21/books/shame-in-simla.html [accessed 6 August 2018]

[109] *Five timeless translations to read, and what bad translations are*

Ratan's talents and rather an indicator of the paucity of high-quality translations in the early 1990s.

In terms of his professional background particularly relative to translators working today, Ratan can be identified as a 'hobbyist' or amateur translator working in an era before the establishment of major world literary and translation studies departments in the academy and the subsequent attention this brought to translated literature outside the university system. The rise of the professionalised translator lends translators an aura of celebrity on par or close to being on par to the writers they are translating, as was evidenced by the publicity that surrounded Deborah Smith following *The Vegetarian*'s translation. In this environment, it is not surprising that Grunebaum was granted multiple pages' worth of space in *The Three Walls of Delhi* to discuss his engagement with Prakash's writing and his own translation choices as well as the chance to contribute an essay on his translation process to the critical anthology *In Translation: Translators on Their Work and What It Means* (2013). Through understanding the evolving role of 'the translator', it is possible to understand both the reception of poor-quality translations from the 1980s and early 1990s and also grasp why literature in translation has enjoyed greater popularity in the last two decades as translators have professionalised. In the case of 'Kavve aur kālā pānī', I discuss below how Ratan and Singh's ineffective translation choices have stymied the reception of Verma's short stories in English.

Close reading of the text

One of the most significant discrepancies between the Hindi original and English

translation of 'Kavve aur kālā pānī' is the failure to capture the tone of mystery,

particularly relating to place, that Verma establishes in the original text that

reinforces the ambiguity of the events that follow. 'Kavve aur kālā pānī' begins with a

bleak description of the town where the elder brother has settled, from the

perspective of his younger brother, the narrator, who is visiting him from Delhi:

मास्टर साहब पहले व्यक्ति थे, जिनसे मैं उस निर्जन, छोटे, उपेक्षित पहाड़ी कस्बे में मिला

था । [110]

The schoolteacher was the first person I met in this small, neglected and

remote town in the mountains.[111]

In this case, Singh and Ratan translate 'निर्जन' (*nirjana)* as 'neglected' though a more

accurate interpretation might be 'unpeopled' – the suffix 'जन' (*jana)* literally meaning

'people' in Hindi so when combined with a negative prefix, 'निर्जन' literally means 'no

people'. This is a more accurate and evocative description of the lonely, uninhabited

town in which the eldest brother has settled than the adjective 'neglected', whose

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[110] Nirmal Verma, *Kavve aur kālā pānī* (New Delhi: Rajakamal Prakashan, 1999), p. 134

[111] *The Crows of Deliverance*, p. 134

connotations are less mysterious. A little further on from these opening lines, the narrator says:

हिन्दुस्तान जे छोटे, कस्बाई शहर वैसे ही त्रासदायी लगते हैं - ऊपर से बारिश, ठंड और अँधेरा

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By and large, Indian towns are dreary and oppressive. Besides, it was cold dark and raining.[113]

Here, Singh and Ratan translate the narrator's perception of small-town India as an objective statement of fact. However, Verma's framing of this opinion in the Hindi original is different. The narrator's description is delivered as a subjective rather than an objective judgement. Verma uses the phrase 'लगता है' (*lagatā hai*) which directly translates to 'it seems' or 'it appears' and is typically used when speakers voice an opinion of how something appears to *them*. A more accurate interpretation of these lines is 'India's small towns already struck me as tragic – on top of that there was the rain, the cold and the darkness'. Verma does not frame these lines as an omnipotent authorial indictment of Indian small towns as it appears in the translation but rather as the negative opinion of the younger brother, visiting from the large capital metropolis, Delhi, and feeling utterly out of place in the isolated, mountain town where his elder brother has settled. These opening paragraphs clearly establish a

[112] *Kavve aur kālā pānī*, p. 135

[113] *The Crows of Deliverance*, p. 134

sense of geographical location, as well as establishing both the estrangement between the brothers and the rural-urban dichotomy that is common in Hindi literature, including that of the *Nayi Kahani* writers.[114] This rural-urban dichotomy also reflects the dichotomy between the two brothers and ultimately between two selves: the Westernised city versus the traditional and 'mysterious' place close to nature where the *sanyasi* resides.

This sense of two selves is emphasised when English words or phrases appear in the original text. At several points, the narrator vividly remembers the various strategies the family employed to find the older brother following his disappearance, including advertisements. He poignantly remembers:

मुझे अब भी उनकी फोटो याद है, जो पिताजी ने (तब वे जीवित थे) अखबारों में दिया था - एक हँसता हुआ चेहरा, जिसे अंग्रेजी में चियरफुल कहा जाहा है ... और फोटो के नीचे बाबु के हाथ का लिखा टेक्स्ट - "प्लीज, कम..." [115]

I recalled his face from the latest photograph we had of him – in it he looked what they call "cheerful" in English – reproduced in the newspapers over Father's message (he was alive then): *Please Come Back…*[116]

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[114] See: Mohan Rakesh, K. P. Singh and Asghar Wajahat, 'Interview with Mohan Rakesh', *Journal of South Asian Literature*, Vol. 9. No. 2/3, (1973), pp. 15-45

[115] *Kavve aur kālā pānī*, p. 154

[116] *Crows of Deliverance*, p. 151-152

The father's message is expounded upon in another point in the text when the narrator remembers again the familial turmoil that followed his brother's disappearance:

नहीं, फायदा कुछ भी नहीं था, इस पहाड़ की शान्त चोटी से क्या वे तलहटी के तिलचट्टों की बदहवासी समझ पाएँगे ... अस्पतालों और स्टेशनों के चक्कर, पुलिस थनों की लिस्टों पर गुमनाम लोगों के नाम, मुर्दाघर कि शिनख्त, अखबारों में इस्थिहार - प्लीज कम, मदर इज इल ...[117]

No, it was useless to go on. How could he, from his peaceful summit, comprehend the hurry-scurrying torment of the beetles on distant plains? He could not have known what it felt like going on endless rounds of the hospitals, railway platforms, bus stations, or checking the updated police lists of missing persons, or staring into the faces of the dead in the morgues, or placing ads in the newspapers: *Please come back, Mother is ill…*[118]

Firstly, it is striking that when the narrator recalls his brother's smiling face in the photograph used in the 'missing' newspaper advertisement, it is an English adjective he grasps for to describe him, rather than a Hindi one ('he looked what they call

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[117] *Kavve aur kālā pānī*, p. 168

[118] *The Crows of Deliverance*, p. 164

"cheerful" in English'). This is not coincidental, particularly as we learn that the narrator is employed as a writer. Rather the presence of English here indicates how close it is to the narrator's consciousness. He is Westernised to an extent that he instinctively recognises and describes the visual of his brother's smiling face through English, rather than through Hindi. It is not surprising that a middle-class writer, resident in Delhi, would have such a close affinity in English. In all likelihood, it mirrors Verma's own fluency with the language as well as the ease with which Indians of a certain class and education level use English. However, it does demonstrate the role that Euro-American modernity plays in the lives of the narrator and his entire family, represented by the dominance of the English language; a fact that is emphasised by the father's message, which is printed in newspapers in English not Hindi, though this is not made clear by Singh and Ratan in their translation. More accurately, the father's message as remembered in the first instance is 'please come…' (not 'please come back' as Singh and Ratan translate it) and in the second 'please come, Mother is ill' (once again, not 'please come *back*'). Here, Singh and Ratan demonstrate a certain carelessness in their interpretation of Verma's work that does not adequately convey the original meaning. 'Please come back' may be the correct usage in standard British or American English, however 'please come' is the more common phrase employed in Indian English. By using 'please come', Verma demonstrates, even while writing in Hindi, his awareness both of the frequency with which Indian English is used by urban, professional Indians, but also the fact that Indian English is its own register of the language, distinct from standard British or American English, replete with its own linguistic idiosyncrasies

and anachronisms.[119] In my second chapter on *Maī*, I discuss how Nita Kumar more effectively uses Indian English in her translation of Shree's novella.

In the closing pages of the text, the narrator falls asleep in the elder brother's dwelling, and is woken when the elder brother calls to him, using a Hindi endearment:

"छोटे!"

एक धीमी-सी आवाज सुनाई दी; मेरे ऊपर लालटेन थी और वे मुझे बुला रहे थे, दस साल बाद उनके मुँह से अपना घर का नाम सुनकर मैं हड़बड़ाकर उठ बैठा । लगा, मैं अपने घर में हुँ; आँखें फाड़ते हुए उन्हें देखने लगा जो ऊपर से मुझे देख रहे थे । [120]

"*Chhote!*" he was calling out to me.

I heard him faintly and saw the lantern he held over me. Ten years earlier he had called me by that pet name: *Chhote*, Little Brother. I sat up, startled. Where am I? Was I back home? I started wide-eyed at him.[121]

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[119] See: Kavitha Rao, *Don't prepone it – do the needful. 10 Indianisms we should all be using* (2016) https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jan/04/indian-english-phrases-indianisms-english-americanisms-vocabulary [accessed 4 August 2018]

[120] *Kavve aur kālā pānī*, p. 188

[121] *The Crows of Deliverance*, p. 181

Here Singh and Ratan do not translate the Hindi 'chhote' into English and instead insert a translation of the term into the text. This suggests that there is something in the endearment 'chhote' that cannot be effectively captured in English (and indeed, the phrase 'Little brother' does not carry the same sentimental tug in English that 'chhote' connotes in Hindi). However, once again, Singh and Ratan do not convey Verma's sense wholly. Verma does not write that the eldest brother calls the little brother by a pet name, instead he writes that he calls him by his '*ghar kā nām*' after ten years, in other words the name he is called at home. Once again, Verma skillfully demonstrates the split in the way that Hindi and Indian English are employed by urban Indians. The Hindi phrase carries with it a strong association with the domestic: '*ghar kā nām*' literally means 'name of/in use in the house'. Meanwhile, in the public world of newspapers, where the brother's photo is advertised, even the older generation of the family uses English rather than Hindi: 'please come'. This split goes deeper than simply portraying a linguistic mundanity of urban Indian life. It speaks to a cleavage between the domestic sphere as a space for 'indigenous' Hindu or Indian culture and the public sphere as a Westernised space, a cleavage that has occupied Indian writers since the colonial period and which also features as a key part of the narrative of Shree's *Maī*.[122] The fact that it is this term of endearment that the elder brother uses and to which the younger brother has such an emotional response, once more underlines the potentially allegorical nature of

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[122] See for example Rabindranath Tagore, *Home and the World*, ed. by Swagato Ganguli, trans. by Sreejata Guha, (India: Penguin Books, 2005).

both characters, the older brother moving towards a more 'authentic' Hindu self,

versus the younger brother, who is Westernised, urbanised and professionalised.

Yet in 'India and Europe: The Self and the Other', Verma also makes it clear –

despite his criticism of European 'spiritual vacuity' – that Indian modernity is not a

simple rejection of the European colonial encounter, nor a total embrace of the

traditional Hindu self. Instead, Verma praises Mohandas Gandhi, with whom he

claims 'we enter, for the first time, the modern phase of Indian consciousness'.[123]

Verma praises Gandhi for 'acting as a true modernist; operating simultaneously on

two levels: on one level, a representative of European consciousness by introducing

the concept of 'personal conscience' in the codified world of orthodox Hinduism, and

on another level using the Hindu concept of *dharma*, as the only valid framework

within which the western concept of individual freedom could acquire its moral

legitimacy'.[124] He adds that 'if Gandhi changed the entire nature of discourse

between India and Europe, it is because he radically redefined the categories of the

self and the other – not two exclusive, autonomous entities but one implicity [sic]

inherent in the other'.[125]

We can interpret the ending of 'Kavve aur kālā pānī' through the lens presented by

Verma when assessing Gandhi's intellectual and cultural legacy. It is clear that

Verma does not believe that European cultural and critical thought should be

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[123] *India and Europe: The Self and the Other*, p. 158

[124] Ibid, p. 159

[125] Ibid

rejected wholesale by Indians, nor that it should be adopted to the exclusion of traditional Indian thought, identity and culture, but rather that there should be a 'space where each tradition could speak to another tradition from its own ground of being'.[126] It is perhaps for this reason the two brothers in the text are not presented as totally oppositional characters. The *sanyasi* is ambivalent about his own devotional duties, as demonstrated by his comments to the schoolteacher and the schoolteacher's evaluation of his slightly odd behaviour. Meanwhile, the younger brother is wistful about his elder brother's life and a part of him is clearly drawn to remain with him, at least for a few days, at the end of the story.[127] Verma's interest in a dual understanding of the self, where the European self is inherent within the Hindu Indian sense of self, lends a new perspective to the ambivalent ending of the text. The narrative does not present either brother as being in the wrong or the right and it is perhaps for this reason that they do not undergo any kind of emotional violence at the end of the story. In his final remarks in 'India and Europe: The Self and the Other', Verma stresses the significance of 'listening' as 'both a discovery and a revelation, a discovery of the other within ourselves and the revelation of ourselves through the other'.[128] Perhaps it is this that is the final achievement of the characters in the story. The narrator is not able to voice his internal monologue of questions nor is there a confrontation between the two brothers that affirms one lifestyle choice over another. Instead there is a sense by the close of the text, that the younger brother has attempted to 'listen' to the elder brother, and the limited answers he

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[126] Ibid

[127] See: *The Crows of Deliverance*, p. 177-178

[128] *India and Europe: The Self and the Other*, p. 163

provides for his self-imposed exile, though the extent to which he has been successful in truly understanding him is ultimately doubtful. The wider implications of this may be understood on an allegorical level: that the isolated rural setting and bristling metropolis can be brought together briefly, even if understanding is ultimately elusive.

It is apparent from this close reading of the text that Verma is not simply 'rehearsing' European existentialism in his stories and was in fact able to deftly navigate and represent the culture of urban, Europeanised Indians in Hindi as well as grapple with the Indian encounter with modernity effectively in his fiction writing. However, the questionable quality of the English translations of Verma's Hindi short stories in *The Crows of Deliverance* means that it is easy for Verma's work to be mischaracterised and his sophisticated arguments about Indian modernity, the colonial encounter and the Indian self to be lost in English-language critics' interpretation of his work. This makes it clear that any understanding of the vernacular literary sphere in South Asia by an English-language reader or critic is hampered by language barriers, and further stymied by inadequate translations of major vernacular writers. This is significant not only because it can flatten or simplify the complex and nuanced contributions of major writers, such as Verma, but because it can also risk mischaracterising whole movements, such as the perception of 'Naya Kahani' writers as a whole as being shallow imitators of modern European writers, thereby making assessing their legacy on future generations of vernacular writers more difficult. Verma's example demonstrates the way that superficial engagement with vernacular writers, and the shifts that have taken place in vernacular literary spheres, compounded with the problem of inadequate translations, can lead to

mischaracterisations of these writers' texts, their legacies and their overall contributions to literary and critical thought in India, when they are brought onto the stage of 'global literature' and Western literary criticism.

Chapter 2. Geetanjali Shree's *Maī* (1991)

Geetanjali Shree's *Maī* (Rajkamal Prakashan, 1991) is compelling for the text's focus on themes of marginality or subalternity: identities relating to class, caste, gender, race, sexuality, etc. that subordinate groups and individuals within their own and wider society. Themes of marginality or subalternity can impact the value assigned to a vernacular text, influence its translation into English and ultimately signify value on the stage of national and international prestige. As established in the Introduction with reference to Brouillette's scholarship, literary representations of marginality can often be co-opted into political governance as such literature can then be instrumentalised as a social good. Certainly when examining the discourse around *Maī* and its translation by Nita Kumar (Kali for Women, 2001) it is clear that the novel's representation of North Indian women under patriarchy was effectively instrumentalised by its feminist translator and publishing house, for whom the social dividends offered by a novel such as *Maī* often seem to outweigh its value as a literary text.

The key marginal identity represented in *Maī* is that of gender and often other forms of subalternity, such as caste and class, are overshadowed or subsumed within the novella's narrow focus on gender. Arguably *Maī* followed what might be the "expected" trajectory of a text moving from the periphery into hyper-centrality as it gathered greater recognition in English than in Hindi, demonstrated by the translation's recognition from the Sahitya Akademi and Crossword Book Awards respectively. While Shree is adamant that Hindi has been the most significant language for the reception of her writing, she acknowledges that through translation

her work has reached readers and regions it might otherwise not have.[129] The

shifting value of *Maī* in translation can be contrasted to Nirmal Verma's short stories,

which achieved recognition in Hindi but whose poor quality English translations likely

stymied their wider national, let alone international, recognition. This reveals that

despite the hyper-centrality of English, translation alone is not sufficient for a writer to

achieve international recognition as the quality of the translation inevitably impacts

the level of recognition received. Furthermore, the personal subjectivity and

ideological position-taking of a translator and even publishing house can help shape

the kind of reception a text receives, as we shall see occurred with *Maī*.

The decision to translate *Maī* into English was made for what can be termed political

or sociological reasons as much as literary ones. Shree recalls that historian and

scholar Nita Kumar was interested in translating *Maī* for its '"feminist" potential' and

that the feminist press Kali for Women wished to publish her work at the same

time.[130] In her seminal essay, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Gayatri Spivak argues that

'the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant' and that in an era

of colonial subjugation 'the subaltern [male subject] has no history and cannot speak'

while 'the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow'.[131] Though set in the

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[129] Trisha Gupta, "English has given me some new access but it is Hindi which has got me fame: Geetanjali Shree" (2015) https://scroll.in/article/731104/english-has-given-me-some-new-access-but-it-is-hindi-which-has-got-me-fame-geetanjali-shree [accessed 17 February 2019]

[130] Ibid

[131] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?', in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory* (New York, Sydney : Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 82-83

postcolonial period, *Maī*'s reception in both Hindi and English is shaped by the questions that Spivak puts forward. We can see this at the immediate level of the English translation's modified title, *Mai: Silently Mother,* which adds a subtitle that does not exist in the Hindi original but that reinforces ideas of silence, marginality and gender for *Maī*'s English language readers.

The marginality of the characters in *Maī* is wholly determined by their gender; as part of an upper-caste, upper-class North Indian household they are insulated from harm in almost every other way. Spivak's central question 'Can the subaltern speak?' seems particularly relevant to the eponymous character of *Maī*, the silent mother the English title alludes to, who is rendered almost entirely voiceless and whose character often recedes into the 'shadow' against her overbearing husband and in-laws. Spivak's essay, published in 1988, a few years before *Maī*'s publication and a decade prior to its English translation, undoubtedly had a significant impact upon the academic, literary and publishing worlds that recognised and elevated *Maī*. As I have previously established with reference to Orsini, the 1990s were particularly productive period for translations in India.[132] While English translations in previous decades were not particularly accomplished, they began to improve from the 1990s onward when a new academic market for English translations began to blossom under the influence of academic or activist publishers, English literature Indian academics and a new generation of feminist and gender studies writers and academics.[133] *Maī* was a text perfectly positioned to enter this scenario.

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[132] Francesca Orsini, 'Decreed out of existence: Multilingual India and World Literature', p. 41

[133] Ibid

Women's writing and the world of feminist publishing

Orsini notes that while a number of high-quality English translations were produced during the 1990s, translation into English did not guarantee 'international circulation and recognition'.[134] We can see this most clearly demonstrated in the example of Dalit literature, which in recent decades has generated significant interest amongst both Western and Indian academics, having been translated and published by university and speciality presses as well as becoming the focus of new scholarship from critics such as Laura Brueck and Sarah Beth Hunt. Yet this attention has not necessarily resulted in international recognition nor in international or even national awards and accolades. Major Dalit writers have largely been unrecognised by major prize giving institutions, even as their writing features prominently on both national and international university curricula.[135] A recent exception to this has been the longlisting of a translation of Bengali Dalit writer Manoranjan Byapari's *Batashe Baruder Gondho* (2013) about the 1970s Naxalite movement, for the 2019 DSC Prize, perhaps indicated the belated shifting of attention towards Dalit literature in translation from the Anglophone literary community.

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[134] Ibid

[135] See: 'Decreed out of existence'; Mohan dāsa Nemishrey, *Mohan dāsa Nemishrey on Dalit Participation in Sahitya Akademi* (2017), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0X8DBt1f7tM [accessed 18 February 2019]

While the focus of this study is not Dalit literature, it nonetheless provides a counterpoint to the reception of vernacular women's writing in translation. As the example of *Maī* illustrates, women's writing from India has achieved greater success in the mainstream and represents a comparatively less 'marginal' identity; though of course it is important to note that Dalit women writers are doubly marginalised by both their caste and gender identities and any discussion of recognition of Dalit literature can be further granularised by questions of gender, class and religion. Unlike the work of many Hindi Dalit writers, *Maī* has achieved recognition at the national level with literary organisations such as the Sahitya Akademi. However, Orsini is correct that translation is not an automatic ticket to international success. While *Maī* in translation has succeeded in some ways where other translations about "subaltern subjects" have not, its success appears to be limited to the national stage of literary renown. There is little evidence that it has broken through into the Anglosphere beyond India.

As a middle-class urban Indian fluent in English, Shree like Verma could also have chosen to forge her literary career in English rather than Hindi. As noted by Rashmi Sadana in *English Heart, Hindi Heartland*, Shree does in fact use both English and Hindi as a writer but reserves English for her non-fiction pursuits and Hindi for fictional work.[136] This binary provides an insight into the different emotional and intellectual registers associated with each language: English, the medium for non-fiction, is used to represent facts and rationality whereas Hindi, the medium for

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[136] Rashmi Sadana, *English Heart, Hindi Heartland: the Political Life of Literature in India* (Berkeley, California, London: University of California Press, 2012), p. 118

fiction, is connected to emotionality and creativity. This biographic detail is reflected in *Maī*, where the different worlds and registers demarcated by Hindi and English weigh on the novella's narrator heavily, as I shall illustrate in my close reading later in the chapter.

In order to better understand the reception that *Maī* and its translation generated, it is important to first contextualise the literary scene into which the text emerged. Two key components that shaped this scene were the rise of feminist publishers in the 1970s and 1980s, foregrounded by the women's movement, as well as the evolution of women's writing in India up to this point. Although, I do not have space to lay out the full scope of women's writing in India up until the late twentieth century, this history, including particular movements and writers, is charted elsewhere. A well-known example is Susie Tharu and K. Lalita's extensive anthology *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present*. In the preface to this collection, Tharu and Lalita chronicle a wide-ranging history of women's writing across multiple regions and vernacular languages against the backdrop of continuous political and social change. They chart the shift of Indian creative output, including literature, from creators such as artisans and courtesans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to 'an English-educated urban middle class' by the dawn of the twentieth century.[137] In tandem, gender and sexual ideologies in India became increasingly conservative and a new binary opened up between women: respectable middle class women

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[137] Lalita K, Susie J. Tharu, *Women Writing in India*: *From 600B.C. to the early twentieth century*, (New York : Feminist Press at CUNY, 1991), p. 8-9

versus their 'disrespectable' lower class counterparts.[138] These developments are worth highlighting when examining a novella such as *Maī*, produced by a member of that same 'English-educated urban middle class' about her own community and concerned with themes of gender, modernity and respectability.

Earlier I established that *Maī* was a compelling example due to the marginality of the text as it related to gender. However marginality is a relative and shifting concept. The narrator and her female family members in *Maī* may be marginalised due to their gender but in many other ways they are protected from harm or subordination, due to their caste, class and religion. This is evident in the text itself through the household's interactions with their domestic staff and the poorer families of the neighbourhood. Lalita and Tharu note in their Preface to *Women Writing in India* that 'middle class women, white women, upper-caste Hindu women might find that their claims to "equality" or to the "full authority" of liberal individualism are at the expense of the working classes, the non-white races, Dalits, or Muslims'.[139] While Shree does represent moments of genuine female solidarity across class and caste barriers within the novella, the key form of marginality presented in *Maī* revolves around upper-caste, upper-class womanhood. This is worth considering both in relation to the content of the novella as well as in relation to its reception and success with mainstream institutions such as the Sahitya Akademi and with urban middle-class readers in India. I previously highlighted the difference in recognition that Dalit writers have received relative to writers such as Shree even after their work has

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[138] Ibid

[139] Ibid, p. 38-39

been translated into English. It is possible to infer that the Indian 'English-educated urban middle class' might welcome a novel from a writer such as Shree who shares their background and whose exploration of marginality is recognisable to them without challenging their own dominance within Indian society in comparison to more provocative writers such as Omprakash Valmiki and Ajay Navaria.

The development of women's writing in India, particularly in the late twentieth century, was further shaped by the women's movement of the 1970s and 1980s occurring both nationally and internationally. The women's movement is a spectre that haunts the narrative of *Maī*, as it is clear that the younger generation embodied by the narrator Sunaina are the inheritors of the fruits of the women's movement. In her essay recounting the changing trends of Indian feminism, Sarbani Guha Ghoshal identifies 'women's rights with emphasis on health, mortality, nutrition, equality, security and obviously empowerment' as being at the forefront of Indian feminists' aims.[140] Anxiety about the fulfilment of these aims makes itself present in *Maī*, particularly in the relationship between the eponymous mother and her children, as I shall draw out in my close reading.

The women's movement also gave rise to the feminist publishers that facilitated *Maī* to be translated and circulated amongst new audiences in English. Ritu Menon, one of the founders of Kali for Women, discusses the context that gave rise to the publishing house in her essay 'Dismantling the Master's House' (2000), a piece that

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[140] Sarbani Guha Ghosal, 'Major Trends of Feminism in India', *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 66. No. 4 (2005), pp. 793-812

borrows its title from Audre Lorde's iconic essay 'The Master's Tools Will Never

Dismantle the Master's House' (1984), indicating the international-facing outlook of

many educated Indian feminists of the era. Menon identifies the Indian women's

movement of the post-Nehruvian period as instrumental in the development of Kali

for Women. She notes that the company was formed in 1984, following the surge of

the women's movement in India in the previous two decades, and that they

perceived themselves 'as located somewhere between the women's movement and

women's studies, very much a creation of both'.[141] This statement demonstrates that

Kali for Women's founders were motivated by politics and activism, demonstrating

what Brouillette identifies as the capacity for art to be co-opted into cultural and

political governance as a social good, in this case a social good to achieve

feminism's aims. Menon adds that 'we wanted to provide a progressive gender

perspective on all issues and enable women's voices to be heard as far and as wide'

as was possible.[142] She also notes that as the women's movement became

increasingly 'mainstreamed' and 'institutionalised', the commercial justification of a

press such as Kali for Women was solidified as publishers were increasingly

confident of the sales prospects of feminist texts.[143] This compliments Kumar's

stated motivations for translating *Maī* into English, which Shree points out was due to

Kumar's interest in the text's 'feminist' credentials. It is underlined by Kumar's

Afterword in *Mai: Silently Mother*, where she states that *Maī* was of 'profound

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[141] Ritu Menon, 'Dismantling the Master's House: The Predicament of Feminist Publishing and Writing

Today', *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol. 7 Issue 2, (2000), pp. 289-301, p. 292

[142] Ibid

[143] Ibid, p. 298

interest' to her as the text achieves 'at the level of fiction what [Kumar] strive[s] to do through history and anthropology'.[144] Kumar also states that she cannot distinguish between a 'work of fiction' and 'a social science text', revealing that a large part of her interest in *Maī* was due to its social efficacy.[145]

When first published in translation, *Mai: Silently Mother* garnered recognition for its sensitive portrayal of 'three generations of women' and 'feminism for hard times' in contemporary reviews by outlets such as *India Today* and *Tribune India*.[146] The novel's other significant themes, such as childhood, family, rites of passage, and the public versus private worlds demarcated by English and Hindi, are not a central part of the discourse of contemporary reviewers who instead focus on the novella's representation of gender. This does suggest that a translation, even a high-quality translation such as Kumar's, can shift the meanings of a text somewhat. *Maī* is a complicated novella and its scope ranges further than simply being a portrait of women living under patriarchy. However, as it is its feminist value that gripped the attention of its translator and likely its publisher as well, the other elements of the text in translation recede in comparison to the focus on its themes of marginality relating

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[144] *Mai: Silently Mother*, p. 211

[145] Ibid, p. 210

[146] Akshaya Kumar, *Daughter as protector of mother* (2001) < https://www.tribuneindia.com/2001/20010805/spectrum/books.htm> [accessed 5 December 2019] and Shalini Gupta, *Book review: Geetanjali Shree's 'Maī'* (2000), < https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/society-the-arts/books/story/20001127-book-review-of-geetanjali-shree-Maī-778508-2000-11-27[accessed 5 December 2019]

to gender. This can be challenging for the author who may not share their publisher's or translator's activist reasons for producing a text. Renowned Hindi writer Krishna Sobti notes in response to an interview question regarding contemporary discourse on women's writing that 'Titles such as "Stories by women writers" are being used as critical gestures. To fix women in a definite frame, they have cited the names of two important novels of Hindi under this title … Both these novels have been evaluated only as women's writing'.[147] The example that Sobti gives here appears strikingly similar to a description of a Kali for Woman title that Menon makes in an interview:

> Recently, we've brought out *And the World Changed,* a collection of stories by Pakistani women … a stunning collection of twenty-four of the most creative women writers in Pakistan today, all of them remarkable for the range and accomplishment of their writing. Fable, faction [sic], prose-poetry, memoir as social history, autobiography as political commentary; it's all there.[148]

A trend that Menon appears to note with pride Sobti characterises with trepidation. Indeed, from a perspective that evaluates women's writing on the basis of literary merit rather than political or 'social science' value, one might question the value of a collection that collapses a diverse selection of Pakistani women writers working in different genres and presumably across different themes, into a single anthology. It

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[147] Krishna Sobti, Preeti Gupta Dewan and Anamika, 'Krishna in Conversation with Anamika', *Indian Literature*, Vol. 57 No. 3, (2013), pp. 21-35 (p. 31)

[148] Robert Fraser, '"Half the World is Not So Narrow": Feminist Publishing in India', *Wasafiri*, Vol. 22 Issue 3 (2007), pp. 11-17 (p. 12)

is evident therefore that the focus of publishers, reviewers, readers and activists on marginality in literary texts might help boost those texts in terms of their commercial recognition however they may also simplify those texts into easily digestible anthologies of women's writing or obfuscate more subtle themes in their work, such as the less showy nuances of growing up and language that Shree presents in *Maī*, in favour of a single-minded focus on gender.

Geetanjali Shree's *Maī*

Maī is a novella numbering 167 pages in both the Hindi original and in English translation. It follows the lives of a close-knit family, living in the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh in the decades following Independence. The text is narrated from the perspective of the daughter of the household, Sunaina. From childhood, Sunaina and her younger brother, Subodh, are united on a single mission: to liberate their mother from what they perceive to be the oppression of her daily life, occupied with domestic drudgery as well as from her relationships with her husband and in-laws who treat her poorly. The novella's title *Maī* refers to Sunaina's mother; 'mai' being a colloquial term for a mother in North India. All the elders in the text are referred to by generic familial nouns, both in the Hindi original and in the English translation. Therefore, Sunaina's mother is 'mai', her father 'babu', her paternal grandparents 'dada' and 'dadi', her maternal grandfather 'nana' and her aunt and uncle 'bua' and 'phuphu'. The only characters referred to by their names are the younger generation: Sunaina, Subodh and their peers. At a turning point in the novella, Sunaina and Subodh are shocked to learn their mother's name ('Rajjo') through a rare encounter with their maternal relatives:

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रज्जो? मैं इस नाम से किसी जीव को नहीं जानती ... हमने कभी सोचा ही नहीं थी । माई

हमसे पहले भी ज़िन्दा थी? एक बच्ची थी जिसका नाम रज्जो थी? हमसे अलग कुछ थी?[149]

Rajjo? I didn't know any creature by that name … I had never given it a

thought. Had Mai had a life before us? Could she have been a little girl whose

name was Rajjo? Could she have been something apart from us?[150]

This moment demonstrates that Sunaina does not refer to her relatives as 'babu',

'dada', 'dadi', etc., simply as a gesture of filial respect. She has in fact only

conceived of her relatives including her beloved mother in relation to herself and

Subodh. The idea that Mai has a subjectivity of her own, apart from her children, as

well as a history of her own is a shock to both Sunaina and Subodh. When Mai's

parents come to visit her after a long separation, Sunaina describes herself and

Subodh thus:

और हम एक तरफ़ खड़े हो गये । छोटे होते चले गए, छोटे, उससे भी छोटे, अद्दश्य हो गए ।

आपनी ज़िन्दगी में हमने माई को जगह दे रखी थी जहां हम खुद वीचोबीच थे । पर अब हम

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[149] *Maī*, p. 121-22

[150] *Mai: Silently Mother,* p. 119

ही कहीं नहीं थे । माई थी और उसके जीवन में हमारी कोई जगह नहीं थी, वह खुद उसमें

वीचोबीच लौट रही थी, वह फूट-फूटकर जुड़ रही थी ।[151]

We stood to one side. We kept getting smaller, and smaller, and smaller still, and became invisible. We had given place to Mai in our lives with ourselves right in the middle. Now we ourselves were nowhere. Mai was returning to the centre of her life, she was putting herself back from pieces to whole, and in her life there was no place for us.[152]

The sense of abandonment in these sentences is striking, particularly from children who love and wish to help their mother. It suggests that the very act of mothering may have necessitated Rajjo, a person with her own identity, to recede into the background in order to allow her children to come to 'the centre'. When Rajjo momentarily reclaims that suppressed subjectivity and independence, it is her children who 'became invisible' and disappear into 'nowhere'. This is a complex and layered moment as it reveals that Sunaina and Subodh are complicit in the very subordination from which they wish to liberate Mai. It is part of a turning point within the novella of Sunaina's understanding of Mai and their relationship.

In the early chapters of the novella, Sunaina describes a family that is wealthy and to an extent, resembles the same type of feudal, land owning family of the pre-

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[151] *Maī*, p. 123

[152] *Mai*: *Silently Mother*, p. 121

Independence period that appeared in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

stories of Tagore and Premchand. Natural produce, for example, is plentiful in the

children's lives: a benefit of the land their grandfather owns in the area. In the first

part of the novella Sunaina's grandfather is a fierce patriarch that the entire family

fears and strictly obeys. However the era of dominance of men such as Sunaina's

grandfather is shown to end in the novella's final chapters when Sunaina and

Subodh risk losing their ancestral home due to the introduction of the Urban Land

Ceiling Act of 1976, indicating how alongside the women's movement, other political

shifts were slowly intruding in the lives of even 'elite' families throughout the

country.[153] In the early chapters of the text, Mai is shown to be firmly under the

dominance of both her in-laws and husband. As Sunaina and Subodh grow up, they

are gradually introduced to different cultural norms and traditions, partly transmitted

through their education in English. In her Afterword, Kumar notes that Sunaina and

Subodh do not merely gain fluency in English as a language but that they also

become fluent in ''English' or 'Western' concepts of the self' and start to 'seek

freedoms and discover truths that come with their new language'.[154] This echoes

what we have seen earlier in Verma's 'Kavve aur kālā pānī' where the Indian

encounter with Western modernity is partly facilitated through educated Indians'

access to English as a language. It is partially due to this new cultural fluency that

Sunaina and Subodh feel confident forging new paths for themselves, encouraging

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[153] The Urban Land Ceiling Act of 1976 was an attempt to curb the problem of landlordism and

improve social housing by imposing a ceiling on the amount of land individuals could hold in urban

areas.

[154] *Maī: Silently Mother*, p. 201

their mother to seek her freedom and defending her from their other relatives. Near

the midway point of the text, Sunaina's grandparents pass away, facilitating a

change in Mai. After her in-law's deaths, Mai becomes more dominant within the

household and loosens the strict restrictions imposed by her in-laws, for example by

inviting the poor and low-caste women of the neighbourhood to occasionally watch

television and Hindi films in the house.[155]

Subodh and Sunaina's paths diverge as they mature. Subodh moves to England to

study, intermittently encouraging both Sunaina and Mai to move with him. Subodh

also increasingly becomes frustrated with what he perceives as Mai's helplessness

and willingness to be subordinated by others. Sunaina, on the other hand, becomes

increasingly aimless, first claiming she wants to be a doctor but then going to art

school and occupying herself with painting. From the different directions they stake

out, readers can infer that Subodh is the more rational and business-like of the pair

whereas Sunaina is more emotional and abstract. This is emphasised in Sunaina's

abrupt change of heart regarding Mai in the final chapters of the novella. As Kumar

points out after years spent in 'pursuit of reason, logic, individualism, secularism,

modernity and self-fulfilment', Sunaina is abruptly left considering the value of Mai's

acts, including 'penance, fasting, sacrifice, and bending'.[156] Sunaina realises the

world may not be as binary as she and Subodh believed as children. When babu and

finally Mai herself pass away in the closing chapters, Sunaina finds herself anchored

to her ancestral home. Despite her and Subodh's express wish that Mai should

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[155] Ibid, p. 102

[156] Ibid, p. 184

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leave, at the close of the novella it is Sunaina who wishes to stay. This is a testament to the fact that through years of domestic labour, Mai has erected the house into a liveable home for both her children in which they feel completely protected and secure.[157]

Moreover, in the latter half of her life following the deaths of her in-laws, it is clear that Mai had become a self-assured and capable mistress of the house. In one evocative passage, Sunaina notes that after 'Mai put her touch on the garden, there was a new womanly blossoming' and she recalls mornings which brought together the 'sweet gentleness [of] the cooing of the cuckoo … the mild smell of the lime trees mingling with the fragrance' of flowers and 'Mai, her eyes soft, who was a part of these lovely mornings'.[158] This passage makes clear that however powerless her children may have perceived her to be, Mai was able to imbue their ancestral home with her own touch and it is therefore unsurprising when Sunaina is reluctant to leave home as an adult. In the novella's final paragraph, Sunaina carries a memento of her mother's with her when she finally does leave, feeling the 'ash' of the memento 'warm … and smoldering' within her 'with the fire of Mai's unlived and unseen life'.[159] This concluding description of Mai's life as 'unlived and unseen' suggests that Sunaina has realised that in her and Subodh's shared attempts to 'empower' their mother, they failed to understand or fully appreciate her life. By the end of the novella Sunaina understands that in order to better understand herself, she must

[157] Ibid, p. 109, p. 197

[158] Ibid, p. 88-89

[159] Ibid, p. 167

understand her mother and the lessons she sought to impart on Mai's own terms,
and also to understand why, as Kumar states, 'improving their mother's lot' was a
'fallacious proposition' in itself.[160]

Through Sunaina's change of heart, we as readers can glimpse the reasons why
Shree chose to write this text in Hindi rather than in English. English forms an
integral part of Sunaina's own education and development and it is clear that both
she and her brother are attached to the language as well as the cultural concepts
they have learned through that language. Nonetheless, by the end of the novel
Sunaina is more curious to learn about her mother's 'unlived' life and has shed her
childish confidence that what she and Subodh once believed was best for Mai was in
fact best. Unlike 'babu' and 'dada', Mai does not know or use English in the novella
nor does their 'dadi'. The women of the house converse in Hindi and Bhojpuri,
demarcating a linguistic barrier between the private, domestic world they populate
and the public world with which 'babu', 'dada' and eventually Sunaina and Subodh
are familiar. This point is expanded upon effectively by Sadana in *English Heart,
Hindi Heartland*:

> the mother tongues of many English-educated Indians … are often relegated
> to the kitchen … a "kitchen" language … suggests a less cultivated form of
> language with a restricted vocabulary that one uses to speak to mothers,
> grandmothers and domestic help, a language they presumably speak among

[160] Ibid, p. 185

themselves. It is not the language of intellectual discourse and "getting ahead"

but the language of emotional needs and wants, of "going back". The shift can

be seen as a privileging of English over the bhashas, but it could just as well

be seen as the privileging of "getting ahead" over "going back".[161]

In her final revelation, Sunaina becomes more attuned to the importance of the

'language of emotional needs and wants' and, unlike her brother, who rants that she

will become a 'nothing' like Mai if she remains in the ancestral home, Sunaina is

curious to "go back" instead of relentlessly "getting ahead". Sunaina's choice to

narrate in Hindi is an attempt to be closer to Mai and also understand her life better

by narrating their shared history in the language that her mother knew best and

operated in on a day to day basis. As Kumar points out in her Afterword, 'no one can

merely learn a language … when the language learnt stands for a culture, then is it

particularly difficult not to take what 'words stand for' to heart'.[162] I would apply this

point that Kumar makes in reference to the children learning English to Sunaina's

use of Hindi when narrating Mai's life. By using Hindi, Sunaina immerses herself in

the worlds of her mother and grandmother and brings herself as well as the reader

closer to them. This choice likely has biographical connotations. Shree tells Sadana

that Hindi is the only language her own mother knows and that fluency in the

language is an important 'link' with her mother.[163] Of her creative style in Hindi,

Shree states 'the Hindi I write in is not a learned Hindi but the Hindi I grew up in, the

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[161] *English Heart, Hindi Heartland*, p. 118

[162] Ibid, p. 202

[163] *English Heart, Hindi Heartland*, p. 124

Hindi I spoke to my mother', reinforcing the idea of Hindi as a language associated with emotionality for educated Indians as opposed to English, which connotes learning, ambition and rationality.[164] In the same way, Sunaina's choice to use Hindi and not English represents both an important 'link' with Mai as well as an implicit choice of allegiance with Mai over her brother and father.

This summary makes it clear that despite the brevity of the novella, *Maī* is an exceedingly complex text, with many nuances relating to language, childhood, family and the act of mothering. In the next section, I explore some of those nuances further and the extent to which they are effectively captured in translation with a closer analysis of the text.

Close reading of the text

This section focuses on a number of different strands within the novella, including how Shree narrates the public and private spheres and Sunaina's relationship with English, comparing the vernacular original to Nita Kumar's English translation. I also examine further the interplay of Hindi and English with the third language of the text: Bhojpuri, and what is lost by Kumar's decision to forgo an accurate representation of the use of Bhojpuri in her translation.

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[164] Ibid

From the opening chapter of *Maī*, the division between the 'public' world of men and 'private' world of women is clearly demarcated. Recalling her childhood home, Sunaina writes:

मगर दादा को "बाहर" मान लें और माई को "अन्दर" तो दोनों के बीच का पुल थे भोन्दु और हर्देयी । मियां-बीवी, पर बाहर की सीमा तक भोन्दु का जहान, अन्दर की सरहद तक हरदई का संसर । वहीं सीमा - रेखा पर चीज़ों, सन्देशों, यहाँ तक कि डाँट-फटकार का भी आदान - प्रदान होता !165

If dada was the 'outside' and Mai was the 'inside', then the bridges between them were Bhondu and Hardeyi. They were husband and wife, but Bhondu's estate extended over the outside, and Hardeyi's kingdom was the inside. At the boundaries, objects, messages and scoldings were exchanged.166

These lines effectively illustrate what Sadana describes as the way that 'different languages … are implicated in the social and emotional dramas of a family'. As she suggests, the dynamics of the household in *Maī* are 'divided spatially between men and women, between English-knowers and not-knowers, between the young and the old'.167 In the lines quoted above, gender cuts across class lines and connects Mai to

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165 *Maī*, p. 13

166 *Maī: Silently Mother*, p. 11

167 *English Heart, Hindi Heartland*, p. 125

the serving woman Hardeyi and dada to the male servant Bhondu. We later hear that Mai and Hardeyi are responsible for the lion's share of domestic tasks: 'churning … buttermilk', grinding 'lentils and chutney', fetching wood for the stove as well as the cooking, sweeping and mopping of the rooms.[168] Once again their gender connects the two women as Sunaina notes 'every job that was done by Mai was also done by Hardeyi. There was no clear separation between jobs that were only Mai's and those that were only Hardeyi's'.[169] Yet, a few lines later Sunaina admits that 'Mai *almost always* did the cooking and Hardeyi the sweeping and mopping of the rooms' [emphasis mine].[170] This makes it clear that while gender connects both women, it does not make them equal in the eyes of the household. Mai the upper-caste daughter of an upper-class household is responsible for making food for the family (food being an important ritual purity signifier in caste Hindu society) whereas the working class and possibly low-caste Hardeyi is relegated to the menial cleaning of the house, including its 'sweeping' – itself an activity with strong caste connotations.[171] In this way, Shree builds an effective portrait of the household: one in which the men dominate the women yet even amongst the women, unspoken barriers of caste and class still intrude.

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[168] *Maī: Silently Mother*, p. 13

[169] Ibid

[170] Ibid

[171] See: Sonalde Desai, Amaresh Dubai, 'Caste in 21st Century India: Competing Narratives', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 46 No. 11 (2012), pp. 40-49

The idea of language marking what Sadana calls both 'gendered and generational barriers' arises vividly in the second chapter, during a domestic conflict over food.[172] Discussing the diverse dietary preferences of the household's members, Sunaina recalls:

माई कई किस्म के भोजन बनाने लगी । कब से, कह नहीं सकते । दादा और दादी का वही पक्का भोजन - पूड़ी, पराँठे (दादी पूड़ी अधिक पसन्द करती थीं और पूड़ी हल्की होकर कड़ाही में ऊपर फूल आती !), भजी, रबड़ी या दो बूँद घी के सहारे पक्की कर दी माई खीर । बाबू और हमारे लिए दाल य कढ़ी, फूल्के, चावल, सब्जी, सलाद । पापड़, चटनी, रायता, अचार सबके लिए । और कभी यों ही, किसी के आने पर या दादा या दादी की हाँक पर, या बरसात की झमाझम पर, पकौड़ियाँ, फूलबड़ियाँ, चीले, हलुबा, थाली में भर-भरकर उतारे जाने लगते । बाबू परहेज़ी जीव थे - "हल्की" पूड़ी, फूलबड़ी, ललचाके कभी चख तो लेते पर उनका गुज़ारा होता छेना शहद से, मट्ठा और अखुआदार अन्न से । बाद में हमारी वजह से नए किस्म की इंगलिस्तानी चीज़ें भी आईं जिनमें से एक - दो बाबू भी चाव से खाते और जिनमें से सभी दादी ज़ुरुर से खातीं - सूप, कटलेट, सैंडबिच, आइसक्रीम, केक, बिस्कुट, चाँकलेट ।[173]

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[172] *English Heart, Hindi Heartland*, p. 125

[173] *Maī*, p. 16-17

Mai was versatile in her cooking. Could it always have been so? For dada and dadi the orthodox fried foods – puris, parathas (dadi preferred puris because she wanted to eat light and puris are so light they balloon up to the top of the pan), fried vegetables, cream, and rice pudding made orthodox with two drops of ghee. For babu and us dal or curry, *roti*, rice, vegetables, salad. For everyone, *papads*, chutney, yoghurt, pickles. And sometimes just like that, perhaps at someone's visit, dada or dadi's command, or a monsoon downpour, fritters, fries, pancakes, halwa, were ladled out by the trayful. Babu was a careful eater. He might taste the 'light' puris or fritters, but he survived on cottage cheese, honey, buttermilk and sprouted grain. Later, we were responsible for the introduction of new, Western things, some of which babu ate with pleasure and all of which dadi always did – soup cutlets, ice cream, cake, biscuits, chocolate.[174]

At first reading, the dense list of food that Mai prepares on a routine basis for the family is intimidating and lends strength to Sunaina and Subodh's childhood argument that Mai should be liberated from these oppressive daily tasks. Yet, in the light of Sunaina's revelation at the end of the novel regarding the 'unseen' aspects of Mai's life, and the importance of Mai's labour in building a childhood home in which both Sunaina and Subodh feel secure, this list can also be seen as a testament to maternal love and care. Mai does not explicitly communicate her love for her children at any point in the novella (the opening sentences of the second chapter note that

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[174] *Mai: Silently Mother,* p. 14-15

she 'spoke little'[175]) yet it is apparent on every page through her actions, including her willingness to prepare separate food items for almost every member of the family according to their own pedantic requirements. By the end of *Maī* both Sunaina, and consequently we as readers, are able to perceive these actions not simply as the unfortunate tasks that Mai performs as part of her prescribed role under patriarchy but tasks that she voluntarily undertakes in a demonstration of her love for her entire family.

This passage is striking for other reasons as well, some of which are more readily apparent in the Hindi original than in translation. The idea that Mai is responsible for the cooking and Hardeyi for the cleaning due to reasons of ritual purity is evidenced in this paragraph. In the vernacular, Shree highlights the grandparents' preference for '*pakkā bhojan'*, which historian and anthropologist Saurabh Dube translates as 'food cooked in clarified oil'.[176] Kumar translates '*pakkā bhojan'* as the 'orthodox fried foods'. It is evident that Kumar is not making a literal translation of Shree's words, as she uses three words in place of Shree's two. '*Pakkā bhojan*' in Hindi literally means 'cooked food' and its antonym '*kaccā bhojan*' means 'uncooked food'. Nonetheless, '*pakkā*' carries certain caste and religious connotations that are not evident in the English equivalent 'cooked food'. Dube, for instance, writes about '*pakkā bhojan*' in the context of a religious anecdote where the goddess Danteshwari requests 'coconut, pakka bhojan … and chauka – substances which carried purity' from her

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[175] Ibid, p. 13

[176] Saurabh Dube, *Untouchable Pasts: Religion, Identity, and Power among a Central Indian Community, 1780-1950*, (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 127

devotees, in preference over meat and liquor.[177] It is perhaps for this reason that Kumar chooses to add 'orthodox' to her translation. In Hindi '*pakkā bhojan*' instantly conjures up images of specially prepared, fried food usually for ritual purposes and usually associated with upper-caste Hindu households. This sense is enhanced by Shree's use of '*bhojan*' for food, in place of the more everyday word '*khānā*'. '*Khānā*' and '*bhojan*' are largely synonyms for one another however '*bhojan*' carries religious Hindu connotations that '*khānā*', a word found in everyday use in both Hindi and Urdu, does not. Shree's diction establishes Sunaina's grandparents as upper-caste, observant Hindus for whom food choices and food as an indicator of purity is important; a fact subtly reinforced by the household's strict vegetarianism.

Yet these various connotations are not immediately available for readers of the translation as 'orthodox fried foods' is not a phrase that carries similar connotations in English. Kumar does not provide a glossary or footnotes regarding such terms in her translation. While including a glossary or footnotes might have seemed cumbersome, they might also have helped English readers gain a fuller understanding of the original text. As it stands, the more prominent themes of the novella, such as its focus on gender and the marginality of women, are evident however due to such translation choices and the absence of any glossary or footnotes, more subtle nuances regarding caste, class and language are lost.

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[177] Ibid

The final words of the paragraph, 'soup cutlets, ice cream, cakes, biscuits and chocolate', are written in English transliterated in the Devanagri script in the original text. This element is also lost in Kumar's translation. While Kumar uses the Hindi words for certain food items ('*papads', 'roti', 'halwa*', etc.), she mostly translates them into English so that '*rāyatā*' in the Hindi text becomes 'yoghurt', '*chuṭanī*' 'pickles', etc. When Shree abruptly breaks off from Hindi and begins to list the preferences of the children in English, the change in the original text is startling and signifies a generational barrier between the children and their elders, demonstrated in the preference for Western food and communicated through the use of English. However, this sense of a sharp divide between the two is less apparent in the English translation as it is not made clear that Shree moves between Hindi and English in the original text. Much like the use of Indian English in Verma's stories, the nuances of how English is used alongside vernacular languages by well-educated middle-class Indians in *Maī* is less available to readers in translation than to vernacular readers.

The theme of English encroaching upon the household and upon Sunaina's consciousness continues as the novel develops. Sunaina's younger brother Subodh is sent to a 'boarding school with actual English teachers' due to his grandfather's desire for both Subodh and Sunaina to learn English. When Subodh first returns from school, Sunaina notes 'he had forgotten Hindi somewhat' and is not able to recall the word for 'okra' in Hindi.[178] Meanwhile, Sunaina attends a 'mission school in

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[178] *Mai: Silently Mother*, p. 36

town' to be educated in English at her grandfather's instruction. She notes ironically that 'Dada wanted that I should learn English. But not speak it. Or Hindi either. That is, not speak at all', suggesting once again Spivak's concept of a subaltern female left speechless and in the 'shadow' of her male counterpart.[179] The poor quality of Sunaina's education relative to Subodh's is indicated by two factors. First, she notes her school taught 'Home Science – cooking, sewing, knitting' alongside 'regular classes' while Subodh attends 'guitar classes in his school'.[180] Second, she ironically states that 'in our nice, hot country', the mission school she attends is 'misnamed 'Sunny Side Convent'', a misnomer that suggests quite a different level of English instruction from Subodh's, which is imparted by 'actual English teachers'.[181] Both the domestic tasks Sunaina is taught at school despite her lack of interest and the inferior quality of her English instruction are effective reinforcements of her gender and her lack of value in the eyes of society.

It is not surprising therefore that when Sunaina learns English, she becomes rapidly caught between two linguistic and cultural worlds. Whereas Subodh develops an excellent standard of English that 'impressed' even his father, Sunaina speaks a jumbled register and combines Hindi and English. Sunaina's stumbling speech illustrates, as Sadana notes, that she 'lives not only between Hindi and English but also between the gendered, generational and emotional worlds that those languages

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[179] Ibid

[180] Ibid

[181] Ibid

enact in her life'.[182] Unlike her brother, who is expected to join the public world of men where knowledge of English is essential, Sunaina is caught between the 'inside' world of her mother, Hardeyi and grandmother who converse in Hindi and Bhojpuri and the 'outside' world of her male relatives, with its much more expansive freedom and opportunity. In the text, her confusion is depicted thus:

भाषाएँ भी क्या एक वही "हीथ", एक "खरबुज़े" वाली! अंग्रेज़ी और हिन्दी! पुरा वाक्य अंग्रेज़ी का तो कम-इज़-कम एक शब्द हिन्दी का - आइ वाज़ सेयिन्ग कि ...[183]

the languages were one of the 'heath', the other of the 'melon', English and Hindi. A whole sentence could be in English but at least one word would have to be in Hindi – 'I was saying *ki…*'.[184]

It is interesting that Shree uses the words 'heath' and 'melon' to distinguish between English and Hindi. Earlier in the chapter Sunaina relates with breathless excitement her discovery of English classics including Dickens and the Bronte sisters in her brother's library. She recounts the pleasure she feels as a reader, discovering a new English vocabulary: 'heath', 'meadow', 'heather', 'bracken', 'ivy' and 'daffodil'.[185] This is particularly effective in the Hindi original where Shree transliterates these English

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[182] *English Heart, Hindi Heartland*, p. 121

[183] *Maī*, p. 60

[184] Ibid, p. 60

[185] *Mai: Silently Mother*, p. 59

words into Hindi and the juxtaposition of the two languages gives readers a clear sense of Sunaina's delight at discovering these 'exotic' new words.[186] Shree's romantic diction suggests that similar to postcolonial writers like Salman Rushdie and Michael Ondaatje,[187] Sunaina builds an 'imaginary' England in her mind formed on the basis of the books she reads. Akin to Rushdie and Ondaatje, these pictures 'come to life' when she visits England as an adult.[188]

In the vernacular, when Sunaina wryly comments that she is caught between 'heath' and 'melon', Shree transliterates the English word 'heath' into Hindi while using the Hindi word for 'melon' ('*kharbuze*').[189] Once again, this more effectively renders the tension for Sunaina between these two languages and between the worlds they represent: one an exotic world of the West, of reading, travel and new places, and the other, a familiar world of the house and surrounding fields in which she has grown up, than in the English translation where Kumar uses the English version of both words. In this instance, the translation might have been better served by using 'heath' and '*kharbuze*', accompanied by a footnote. While it might have sacrificed the immediate accessibility for English readers of what Sunaina was trying to say, it would have better carried over the evocativeness of Shree's original words and the gulf between the worlds of Hindi and English. Nonetheless, it should be noted that Shree herself does not use footnotes for the few instances where she uses English

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[186] *Maī*, p. 59-60

[187] Michael Ondaatje, *The Cat's Table* (UK: Vintage, 2012).

[188] Ibid, p. 59

[189] Ibid, p. 60

words in *Maī*. Perhaps Shree expects the audience for her Hindi text to be readers like herself, capable of understanding English and identifying words such as 'ivy', 'bracken' and 'heath' without needing a glossary or further explanation. It also reveals the everyday infiltration of English words into the vocabulary of educated Indians, which Hindi readers experience in *Maī* regardless of whether they know English or not.

The question of whom the text, particularly in translation, is aimed at can help us understand the reasons that underpin both Shree's writing choices and Kumar's translation strategies. In his essay, 'Choosing an English for Hindi', Uday Prakash's translator Jason Grunebaum embarks upon a lively discussion of his own translation choices, when converting Prakash's *Peeli Chhatri Wali Ladki* (2001) from Hindi into English. Grunebaum argues that English-language translators working with vernacular South Asian literature must contend with the significant population of South Asians who are fluent in English and are therefore potential readers. Grunebaum identifies two possible readers for his English translation: one a polyglot reader based in Delhi, the other an American English-speaking reader based in the US. He notes that for the South Asian polyglot reader, he can retain certain Hindi words from the original in translation, as well as use a more typically Indian English syntax ('I am just coming'[190]). However, he cannot assume that his American reader will have the equivalent understanding of Hindi words and Indian concepts for this to

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[190] Jason Grunebaum, 'Choosing an English for Hindi' in *In Translation: Translators on Their Work and What It Means*, ed. by Esther Allen and Susan Bernofsky (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 160

be comprehensible. Consequently, he will have to provide an equivalent translation or an explanation of the Hindi word or Indian concept in English. In this way, Grunebaum argues, translators of vernacular South Asian literature must choose 'which' English they wish to use. He adds that as a native speaker of American English, it is nonetheless a better fit for him to use American English in which he has the greatest facility in his translation, even if Indian English is closer to the vernacular original.

The points raised by Grunebaum are relevant to a closer study of Kumar's translation as well. Having grown up in India, Kumar is a native speaker of Indian English and this may be why we find more instances of Indian English in Kumar's translation of *Maī* than in Grunebaum's translations of Prakash. Kumar discusses this in her Afterword pointing out:

> Hindi is my *mother tongue*. For the first time, I realized while doing this translation why the cadences of 'Indian English' sound so natural to me: a mistake, but a natural mistake. '*Mai se zyada ham hi dyorhi men mandrata rahte*' will naturally occur to a Hindi speaker as 'More than Mai it was we who kept hanging around the house'. A Brit might say, 'We were the ones who, rather than Mai, seemed unable to leave the house'. … First, whatever my natural desire in translating might be, I will choose to use correct English because – simply as speaking the characters in the novel, as well as the

narrator, are all using their language 'correctly' and without a hint of exoticism, quaintness, awkwardness, etc.[191]

Despite Kumar's assertion that she chooses to use 'correct English', a term she does not fully define, I would argue that her syntax is often an Indian English one. In some instances, the choice to use 'correct English' such as colloquial British English in fact renders the translation confusing, for example when Kumar translates the sentence 'सुबोध की कोइ वक़त नहीं होती उस दिन' as 'Subodh had no takers that day', referring to a religious ritual that involved Sunaina and other young neighborhood girls.[192] A more literal translation of this sentence would be 'Nobody had any time to give Subodh that day' or 'it was not Subodh's time at any point that day', which more accurately conveys Shree's original meaning and does not insert a colloquialism where one does not exist in the original.

Kumar's use of Indian English at other points in the text does not detract from the quality of translation but, depending on the reader's perspective, can be said to enhance it. As Grunebaum points out, an Indian English translation can come closer to the vernacular original than an American or British English translation precisely for the ways it replicates the same concepts of the original as well as retains much of its same rhythms. Kumar often employs the continuous present tense in her translation of *Maī*, in sentences such as 'Mai would be laboring away so that nothing was

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[191] *Maī: Silently Mother*, p. 217

[192] *Maī*, p. 55, *Maī: Silently Mother*, p. 55

lacking in the service of the guests' or 'We would keep smoldering'.[193] These
sentences sound awkward to the non-Indian-English ear yet sound natural to Indian
English readers familiar with Hindi, due to the common use of the continuous present
and past participles in Hindi.

Furthermore, Kumar's frequent use of repetition, mimicking Shree's use of repetition
in the Hindi, might also sound awkward to readers unfamiliar with Hindi. For
example, in chapter 28, Kumar uses the adjective 'helpless' several times in the
course of two short paragraphs: 'We are helpless. I was helpless from my childhood.
Helpless in my desperation to save Mai, helpless in not being able to save her, and
then helpless before our frustration…'.[194] In the original text, Shree employs the word
'*majabūr*', which can be translated as 'helpless'. However, unlike 'helpless', '*majabūr*'
can also be used in a verbal construction as well as an adjective, giving the meaning
'to be compelled to' or 'to be obliged to' alongside the meaning 'helpless'. Therefore,
despite Shree's repetition of '*majabūr'* several times in the same two paragraphs in
the original, the effect is different than Kumar's repetition of 'helpless'. As '*majabūr*' is
a word with more grammatical uses in Hindi than 'helpless' in English, and
consequently multiple definitions, it does not feel repetitive or dull for Shree to repeat
'*majabūr*' in the same way as it does for Kumar to repeat 'helpless'. A translator
creating an American or British English translation of the text might have accepted
this and found a more creative way to represent this in English for example, 'from
childhood I knew what it was like to feel compelled. To feel compelled to save Mai

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[193] *Maī: Silently Mother*, p. 135

[194] Ibid, p. 137

but not be able to, and now to feel helpless in the face of my frustration'. As it stands, a non-Indian English reader might find Kumar's translation of these lines unoriginal and presume that Shree's writing capacities are limited, due to her reliance on repetition. An Indian English reader however might associate 'helpless' with '*majabūr*' and better understand the more nuanced use of repetition that Shree employs in the original text. These points illustrate that Kumar most likely aims her translation at Indian English readers like herself and Shree, who will find the syntax of Indian English natural to understand and not 'awkward', as well as be better able to grasp the diction of the original text.

This is emphasised by the fact that Kumar produced her translation for an Indian press Kali for Women. In this case, the question of an audience (Indian readers of English versus international readers) is less conflicted. Kumar might have expected her translation to be circulated largely in India and amongst Indian and postcolonial literary readers and academics, making the use of a majority Indian English syntax more acceptable and perhaps even expected. This might also go some way to explaining the absence of a glossary or footnotes in the text, as both Shree and Kumar might have perceived the audience for *Maī* and its translation to be readers like themselves.

Another striking aspect of the interplay of languages in Shree's original text is the presence of Bhojpuri. Bhojpuri is a North Indian language whose classification is somewhat ambiguous; sometimes claimed as a distinct but related register or dialect

of Hindi and at other times claimed to be a language in its own right.[195] Despite this ambiguity regarding categorisation, in urban India Bhojpuri speakers are often regarded as belonging to a rustic and backwards class.[196] It is unsurprising then that in *Maī*, it is Dadi who is the sole Bhojpuri speaker of the household. Dadi exclusively uses Bhojpuri in Shree's vernacular original when communicating with her other family members. Yet in translation, Kumar does not indicate that Dadi is speaking in a different dialect or language to the rest of the family, as she translates her words into the standard Indian English used by everyone else in the novella. The result of this is two-fold: the comedy of Dadi's interjections are diminished in translation and the significance of Dadi speaking exclusively in Bhojpuri when no one else does is neglected in English. When Dadi speaks in *Maī*, it is usually to make some protestation on behalf of either her beloved son or grandson.[197] Given the sing-song rhythm of Bhojpuri, this is quite funny in the vernacular original however as Kumar does not make any attempt to replicate the presence of Bhojpuri in the English translation, the comedic impact of the original is lessened. (The issue of translating comedy between two very distinct languages is one I will explore further in my next chapter on Prakash's *Mohan dāsa.*)

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[195] For an in-depth discussion regarding categorising Bhojpuri and other North Indian dialects, see Richard Burghart, 'A Quarrel in the Language Family: Agency and Representations of Speech in Mithila', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 27 No. 4 (1993), pp. 761-804

[196] See: Abbi Kumool, 'Politics of Linguistic, Cultural Recovery and Reassertion: Bhojpuri Migrant Population and its Films', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 48 No. 33 (2013), pp. 54-62

[197] See: *Maī*, p. 84

Sadana correctly identifies Bhojpuri as being, alongside Hindi, a 'kitchen language'.

Similar to Hindi, Bhojpuri is of no use when it comes to 'getting ahead' in an

increasingly urbanising, globalising India. In fact, Bhojpuri is of even less use than

Hindi as it is not recognised by the Indian constitution as one of the country's official

twenty-two languages nor does it feature on the curricula of North Indian schools' as

Hindi does.[198] It is unsurprising then that even as the rest of the family appears to

understand their grandmother's words, none of them share her language. Her

educated husband and son converse only in Hindi and English, as eventually do her

grandchildren. Her daughter-in-law, Mai, does not know English but nonetheless

uses Hindi, a more modern and more "useful" vernacular than Bhojpuri. I would

argue that this dynamic is illustrative of the phenomena of generational language

attrition: that is, the loss of a native language amongst successive generations in a

family. Subodh and Sunaina are conflicted over the extent that they should be using

Hindi, and actively encouraged to speak in English. The idea of learning or regularly

using Bhojpuri never occurs to them. From this, it can be inferred that Dadi's

grandchildren are likely not fluent in the language she exclusively uses and are only

able to comprehend as much as is needed to understand her. Readers can assume

that any future generations will be even more ignorant of Bhojpuri. This pattern

effectively demonstrates the ways a native language can be gradually lost within a

family, as its usefulness is outlived, and this reflects the language attrition process

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[198] See: Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, http://www.rajbhasha.nic.in/en/languages-included-eighth-schedule-indian-constution [accessed 24 June 2018]

that has occurred and is occurring throughout India amongst many families and across communities.[199]

It is possible to suggest that the fate of Bhojpuri in Sunaina and Subodh's family prefigures the ultimate fate of Hindi as well: a 'kitchen language' relegated to the domestic world and forgotten once the final 'link' (a female relative) with the language is no longer present. This awareness lends a further poignancy to Sunaina's choice to narrate in Hindi and it connects her not only to Mai, but to the generations of women who have come before them both. By not representing this in any shape or form in her translation, Kumar once again loses a subtle nuance of the original text. The fate of vernacular languages and how they are intimately connected with housebound women like Mai and Dadi lacks the same poignancy in translation as it possesses in the original as Kumar chooses to forgo an accurate representation of the presence of Bhojpuri in the family's linguistic arsenal.

Conclusion

It is evident that translators bring their own subjectivities to a translation. Given Kumar's stated interest in the 'social science' aspects of *Maī* and in the ways in which the text reflects historical and sociological developments in post-Independence India, it is not surprising that her translation's key contribution is its

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[199] For an illustrate example, see: C.J. Daswani, 'Language Attrition: The Case of Indian Sindhi', *Oceanic Linguistics Special Publications*, No. 20 (1985) pp. 191-198

emphasis on the original's representation of women and particularly 'the tropes of feminist writing' that Kumar identifies in Shree's original, including 'narrativising and problematising the past'.[200] It is also evident that part of the effectiveness of Kumar's translation lies in the way it employs Indian English, which brings it closer to the vernacular original's cadences as well as to the language employed by the characters of the novella themselves. Kumar is able to use Indian English in this way due to her own familiarity with it as well as because her translation was first published by a progressive, feminist and India-based publishing house. Kumar's translation is highly effective and accomplished, demonstrated by the recognition it received from different prize bodies such as the Sahitya Akademi and Crossword Book Awards. The national success *Mai: Silently Mother* generated also indicates the potency of concepts such as marginality and subalternity in helping to effectively market a vernacular text in translation. Nonetheless, it also reveals how a translation and its consequent reception is shaped by a translator's own ideological position-taking – as Kumar was particularly interested in the representation of gender in Shree's original work, it is unsurprising that it is this same aspect that is most prominent in her translation of *Maī*.

The work done by academics such as Kumar in the 1990s and early years of the twenty first century to improve the quality of translations of vernacular Indian literature and shine a greater light on vernacular literature would eventually lead to the greater success of more professionalised translators such as Jason Grunebaum,

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[200] *Mai: Silently Mother*, p. 212

Jerry Pinto and Daisy Rockwell in the first two decades of the twenty first century. In my next chapter, I explore how Grunebaum built from the foundation laid by Kumar in his work as a translator.

Chapter 3. Uday Prakash's *Mohan dāsa* (2010)

Uday Prakash's *Mohan dāsa* was originally published as a stand-alone story in Hindi in a special issue of the Indian literary journal *Hans* and included as part of the anthology *The Walls of Delhi*: *Three Novellas* (2012) in English translation by University of WA. Press. Prakash brands himself as something of an *enfant terrible* in the contemporary world of Hindi fiction. A formerly ardent Communist party member, Prakash now lays claim to no specific political ideology.[201] He is a regular critic of the contemporary world of Hindi letters both in his fiction and outside of it, for example relating an anecdote of 'a Hindi critic, a high-caste Brahmin' dissuading students from reading Prakash's work as 'all the central characters there die, go mad, commit suicide, or go missing' and is therefore likely to have a 'very negative influence' on readers.[202] Prakash adds that high-caste Brahmins 'are always the professors and dominate Hindi literature and academics' and he has dubbed such critics '"achaarya" or the "lit-priests"', indicating Prakash's own keen awareness of gatekeepers within the Hindi sphere.[203]

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[201] See: Uday Prakash, *Short Shorts, Long Shots*, trans. by Robert A. Hueckstadt and Amit Tripuraneni (New Delhi: Katha, 2004)

[202] Jason Grunebaum, *A Conversation with Uday Prakash* (2015)

https://www.musicandliterature.org/features/2015/3/26/a-conversation-with-uday-prakash [accessed 7 August 2019]

[203] Ibid

Prakash is also distinct from his peers in terms of his regional background. A profile in *Outlook* notes that he 'grew up speaking Chhattisgarhi in a village 1,037 kilometres from Delhi'.[204] While Prakash spent several decades in Delhi and visited Sitapur rarely during those years, Prakash claim that he now conducts the majority of his writing in his native village of Sitapur in Madhya Pradesh.[205] Prakash is thus an outlier in the Hindi literary sphere both in terms of his politics as well as his regional and linguistic background.

Despite his criticism of the Hindi literary elite, Prakash has not gone unrecognised by important cultural institutions including the Sahitya Akademi, which awarded *Mohan dāsa* the prize for Hindi in 2010. This became a point of contention in 2015 when Prakash returned the award, alongside 'the shawl, the plaque and the cheque of Rs 1 lakh' he received with it following the murder of fellow winner and Kannada writer Malleshappa M. Kalburgi.[206] Several writers returned their award alongside Prakash in protest at the perceived silence from organisations such as the Akademi to increasing hostility towards writers and scholars in India. Unlike others however

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[204] Pragya Singh, *When India's Like a Closed Book* (2015), https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/when-indias-like-a-closed-book/295616 [accessed 6 August 2019]

[205] See: Pamposh Raina, *Five Questions for: Author Uday Prakash* (2013), < https://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/02/14/five-questions-for-author-uday-prakash/> [accessed 6 August 2019]

[206] Avijit Ghosh, *Hindi writer Uday Prakash returns Akademi award over Kalburgi killing* (2015) < https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Hindi-writer-Uday-Prakash-returns-Akademi-award-over-Kalburgi-killing/articleshow/48930730.cms> [accessed 7 August 2019]

Prakash refused to have his award restored to him accusing the government of attempting to rehabilitate its image by offering the awards back to writers.[207] In the same way that he is willing to openly criticise his peers, Prakash criticised the Akademi, claiming that they 'forget' about writers after awarding them and during times of open hostility, there is 'no word of consolation or support from [the Akademi]'.[208] Despite these controversies, Prakash has nonetheless received awards recognition from other quarters, including the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature, which nominated him in 2013 alongside Grunebaum for *The Walls of Delhi* anthology.

As highlighted in my Introduction with reference to the Booker Prize, controversy does not necessarily preclude success, and indeed Prakash's controversial stances have yet to translate into a loss of literary prestige or award recognition. In fact, his star has been on the rise in recent years, mediated partly through his translator, as he has been invited in recent years to speak at universities in Europe and North America including a residency at Carleton College in Minnesota.[209] Though Prakash is a controversial, outspoken figure in the Hindi literary sphere, he is nonetheless a

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[207] *Poet Uday Prakash Refuses to Take Back Sahitya Akademi Award* (2016), < https://www.outlookindia.com/newswire/story/poet-uday-prakash-refuses-to-take-back-sahitya-akademi-award/927984> [accessed 7 August 2019]

[208] *Hindi writer Uday Prakash returns Akademi award over Kalburgi killing* (2015)

[209] Alex Korsunsky, *Esteemed Hindi Writer and Film-Maker, Uday Prakash, in Residency at Carleton College* (2012) < https://apps.carleton.edu/media_relations/press_releases/?story_id=844669> [accessed 6 August 2019]

writer from a dominant background, which possibly shields him from the backlash that might face a more marginalised writer making similar statements or actions. Questions of solidarity, both between Prakash and his Western translator Grunebaum as well as between Prakash and the marginalised characters he is writing about in *Mohan dāsa*, thus forms a key part of my argument in this chapter.

Mohan dāsa is a compelling text due to its absurdist depiction of caste discrimination through a narrative of stolen identity. As I argued in my previous chapter, the marginality of a writer or the characters they are writing about can impact the likelihood of a text being translated into English as well as impact its reception, both nationally and internationally. In this chapter, I explore how the subaltern characters of *Mohan dāsa* are represented in both the original Hindi text and in the English translation and how Prakash's preoccupation with such subaltern characters have impacted both the translation of *Mohan dāsa* and Prakash's international success in recent years. This is particularly relevant as Prakash foregrounds caste discrimination in India against a backdrop of similar discrimination occurring on a global level, whether this is the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan following the 9/11 attacks or human rights abuses perpetrated at Abu Ghraib. It is worth scrutinising the extent to which Prakash's international success is connected to his ability to compare domestic problems of caste, corruption and poverty to global problems and if this also makes his work more 'translatable' for non-Indian audiences. I also contextualise Prakash's writing on caste and caste-based issues within Dalit vernacular writing on caste and Dalit literary criticism on representations of caste in modern Hindi literature.

In some ways, *Mohan dāsa* provides a counterpoint to *Maī* and *Kavve aur kālā pānī* due to Prakash's narrative decision to depict caste discrimination in India as part of a global scheme of elites subjugating the oppressed, in contrast to Shree's more understated and regionally specific depiction of gender oppression in *Maī*, as well as Prakash's use of metafictional authorial asides delivered through parentheses. *Mohan dāsa* is notable for being the only one of the three texts I have selected to have been translated by a non-Indian translator. It also achieved the greatest success in the literary Anglosphere, as well as generating greater success than an earlier anthology of translations of Prakash's work produced by Robert A. Hueckstedt and Amit Tripuranei: *Long Shorts, Short Shorts* and published by an Indian publisher (Katha, 2003). Despite Prakash's combative stance, *Mohan dāsa* has received award and critical recognition; in fact, in terms of both national and international acclaim, Prakash appears to have surpassed his more 'conventional' colleagues, Shree and Verma, having made more of an impact on an international level demonstrated by the shortlisting of *The Walls of Delhi* for the 2013 DSC Prize as well as his speaking engagements at European and North American universities and publication in Western media outlets such as *The White Review.* In the next section, I contextualise Prakash within the wider Hindi canon and seek to understand the extent to which Prakash's oppositional and anti-establishment politics is reflected in his writing style, specifically through his rejection of the dominant mode of twentieth century Hindi literature: social realism.

Social Realism and the Hindi Canon

In explaining his choice to translate Uday Prakash's work, Jason Grunebaum states
that having left behind a career as a translator in the aid industry and completed an
MFA in fiction, he 'wanted to find a contemporary Hindi voice to translate'.[210] When
he came across Prakash's work, Grunebaum describes 'fall[ing] in love' with
Prakash's writing in Hindi and finding Prakash's 'narrative modes' to be 'extremely
innovative and inventive' compared to other examples of South Asian writing in
English.[211] In his Afterword to *The Walls of Delhi*, Grunebaum notes that 'Prakash
has broken from a strict model of social realism that dominated Hindi fiction for much
of the twentieth-century'.[212] In these statements, Grunebaum establishes Prakash as
a unique and distinct literary voice, both from his fellow Hindi writers as well as from
South Asian writers in English, complimenting Prakash's own self-presentation of
himself as an anomaly within the Hindi establishment.

This is reinforced when Grunebaum recounts that Prakash 'toiled for years and years
as a freelance journalist and filmmaker to support himself as a Hindi writer' and there
were 'no cushy academic posts for him'.[213] Here Grunebaum can be seen as acting
as more than just a translator by adopting a marketing or publicity role for Prakash,
calling him a 'decided outlier from the literary establishment' who did not have 'an

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[210] Trisha Gupta, *Talking Walls: Translator Jason Grunebaum on Uday Prakash* (2012)
<http://trishagupta.blogspot.com/2012/12/talking-walls-translator-jason.html> [accessed 2 August
2019]

[211] Ibid

[212] *The Walls of Delhi: Three Stories*, p. 225

[213] *Talking Walls: Translator Jason Grunebaum on Uday Prakash*

easy life at all'.[214] This is striking partly because it is a contradiction of what Grunebaum himself relates in the Afterword to *The Walls of Delhi*: that Prakash taught comparative literature and Hindi at Jawaharlal Nehru University after moving to Delhi in the 70s. While it is likely that Prakash's career, juggling work as a journalist, filmmaker and sometimes academic was precarious, Grunebaum tends to select and discard biographical details about Prakash's life as is convenient on the promotional circuit of media interviews and profiles.[215] We can see Grunebaum the translator taking on the more significant role of interlocutor and intervening in the presentation of Prakash in the public sphere, through recounting his biography while promoting *The Walls of Delhi*.

Coming as he does from a humanitarian background prior to entering the literary and academic sphere, it is unsurprising that Grunebaum gravitates towards a writer such as Prakash, who writes about the marginalised and rejects identification with vernacular literary elites. Having 'found' the contemporary Hindi voice for which he was searching, it is also not surprising that Grunebaum champions Prakash – not only his work (as Nita Kumar championed *Maī*) but Prakash himself as a writer and an 'outlier' within the Hindi literary sphere. In order to evaluate the validity of Grunebaum's claim that Prakash represents a stylistic departure within Hindi writing, it is necessary to first understand how and why 'social realism' came to dominate Hindi literature in the twentieth century.

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[214] Ibid

[215] See: *The Walls of Delhi: Three Stories*, p. 222

This dominance had its roots in the late nineteenth century, with the vernacular novel's emergence in colonial India. As Meenakshi Mukherjee notes, 'the model [of the novel] immediately available to the Indian writer' during this period was the realist British Victorian novel, though the 'reality' of nineteenth century India differed in many quite radical ways from nineteenth century Britain.[216] According to Mukherjee, the dominance of the realist mode in Victorian fiction had come about due to a greater emphasis on individualism, itself the result of factors such as 'the new social mobility that industrialisation had made possible … imperial expansion' and the changing 'relationships between the sexes' that saw for the first time 'romantic love … displacing that of courtly love and marriage'.[217] Of course, many of these social changes had not yet occurred in Indian society, placing nineteenth century Indian authors into something of a dilemma. Mukherjee effectively delineates how authors of the period attempted to create an equivalent of the Victorian realist novel that portrayed their 'reality' in her essay 'Reality and Realism' with reference to four key nineteenth century texts in four different vernacular languages: Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Indira* (1873), O Chandu Menon's *Indulekha* (1888), Hari Narayan Apte's *Pan Lakshyant Kon Gheto* (1890) and Mirza Mohammad Hadi Ruswa's *Umrao Jan Ada* (1899).[218]

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[216] Meenakshi Mukherjee, 'Reality and Realism: Indian Women as Protagonists in Four Nineteenth Century Novel', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 19. No. 2, (1984), pp. 76-85 (p. 76)

[217] Ibid

[218] Ibid

By contrast, India in the twentieth century witnessed a new set of social ruptures, including the end of colonialism, the rise of nationalist, socialist and Marxist politics, rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, and changing relations between different gender, class and caste groups. In light of this, it is unsurprising that a focus on individualism and realism as the dominant mode for fiction writing persisted well into the twentieth century. The most significant transition that occurred in the twentieth century occurred as a result of the influence of Marxist and left-wing political on Indian writers that I discussed in my first chapter. From the 1930s until the 1970s, Ann Lowry Weir argues that South Asian literature was defined not simply by social realism but by *socialist* realism. According to Lowry, socialist realism is not necessarily realistic in nature, rather 'socialist realism insists that literature and politics are all of a piece, with literature providing a vision of future socialist reality'.[219] Key features of socialist realism included 'happy endings' and the presence of a 'positive hero' who identified 'with the cause of peasants and workers just as the followers of Gandhi did' as well as 'a loyalty toward the Soviet Union and its ideology'.[220] Lowry gives the example of the 'young Urdu writers – Sajjad Zaheer, Rashid Jahan, [Ahmed Ali] and Mahmuduzzafar', Mulk Raj Anand and the dramatist Harindranath Chattopadhyaya as writers working within the socialist realist frame in the 1930s.[221]

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[219] Ann Lowry Weir, 'Socialist Realism and South Asian Literature', *Perspectives on Socialist Realism in Asian Literature*, Vol. 27. No. 2 (1992), pp. 135-148

[220] Ibid, p. 137

[221] Ibid, p. 138-140

As I established in Chapter One, even as the influence of Marxism and socialism waned in the 1970s, a focus on individualism persisted and was indeed enlarged upon by the 'Naya Kahani' writers, with their interest in representing the changes taking place in post-Independence India. Realism continued to be the dominant mode for expressing and representing these changes in the fiction of Verma, Mohan Rakesh, Rajendra Yadav, Kamleshwar, and others. By the 1980s and 1990s, Anglophone South Asian writers such as Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Anita Desai and Arundhati Roy were making strides on the international stage of literary prestige. On this stage, magical realism was increasingly associated with postcolonial writing, including the writing of South Asians such as Rushdie and Roy.[222] Considering the uneasy and largely oppositional relationship that existed between vernacular and Anglophone South Asian writers during this period, it is perhaps a further reason why many vernacular writers continued to be loyal to the social realist mode, rather than taking inspiration from the magical realist mode of their English-language peers, in order to draw a further distinction between vernacular and Anglophone Indian writing. Even as a writer such as Prakash began to challenge the social realist mode in the late twentieth and early twenty first century, he nonetheless largely ignored the call of magic realism in preference for postmodernist devices such as parody, irony and absurdism.

In her essay 'The Politics of Postmodernism: Parody and History', Linda Hutcheon argues that postmodernism in art often takes the form of a dialogue between the

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[222] See: John Sutherland, 'Magical Realisms: Borges, Grass, Rushdie and Marquez', in *A Little History of Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013)

present and the past and that devices such as irony and parody are key to this dialogue.[223] She enlarges upon this, stating:

> I want to argue that postmodernism is a fundamentally contradictory enterprise: its art forms (and its theory) use and abuse, install and then subvert convention in parodic ways, self-consciously pointing both to their own inherent paradoxes and provisionality and, of course, to their critical or ironic re-reading of the art of the past … postmodernist art offers a new model for mapping the borderline between art and the world, a model that works from a position within both and yet within neither, a model that is profoundly implicated in, yet still capable of criticizing, that which it seeks to describe.[224]

Hutcheon's framework is useful for understanding Prakash's use of the postmodern in *Mohan dāsa*. As Hutcheon points out, 'postmodernism is a fundamentally contradictory enterprise' and a key part of this contradiction is the parodic subversion of typical conventions. In *Mohan dāsa*, we see Prakash subvert a classically social realist narrative to create an absurdist tale of stolen identity. Furthermore, Prakash provides an 'ironic re-reading of the art of the past' as well as the past generally in *Mohan dāsa* through references to and engagement with key figures of the twentieth century, particularly Gandhi and the North Indian litterateur Premchand. In this sense, Grunebaum is correct that Prakash does represent a departure from the

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[223] Linda Hutcheon, 'The Politics of Postmodernism: Parody and History', *Cultural Critique*, No. 5, (1986), pp. 179-209

[224] Ibid, p. 180

social realism of the twentieth century. Considering Prakash's combative attitude towards the Hindi literary establishment, it is unsurprising that he chooses the postmodernist mode in order to break with and pose a challenge to the class of Hindi elites for whom he expresses contempt. Moreover, these techniques allow Prakash to reveal the limits of the social realist mode, particularly in depicting subaltern struggles. In the following section, I provide a summary of *Mohan dāsa* and demonstrate the instances throughout the narrative when Prakash uses subversion and parody in order to challenge the dominant ideologies of the twentieth century and of Hindi literary elites.

Summary of *Mohan dāsa*

In both the Hindi text and English translation, *Mohan dāsa* begins with a pair of epigraphs in English:

> [T]he most glaring tendency of the British Government system of high class education has been the virtual monopoly of all higher offices under them by the Brahmins.
> 'Slavery' by Mahatma Jotirao Phule, Education Department, Government of Maharastra

> The British … validated Brahmin authority by employing, almost exclusively, Brahmins as their clerks and assistants.

Arthur Bonner, 'Democracy in India: a hollow shell', The American University Press, Washington, 1994[225]

These epigraphs introduce the themes of education and employment, which run through the entire novella and also single out colonial British bureaucracy as the major perpetrator of caste discrimination in India, at least as it is institutionalised in education and through employment. *Mohan dāsa* is presented to readers as a story that has been recounted to the narrator by a third party and the identity of the third party is revealed towards the end of the narrative. Unlike the narrators of *Maī* and 'Kavve aur kālā pānī', the narrator of *Mohan dāsa* is not a character within the central action of the text. This is perhaps why the narrator is able to maintain an aloof, often ironic distance from the central narrative, relating it in a way that is darkly comic compared to the poignancy of the narrative voices in *Maī* and 'Kavve aur kālā pānī'.

The hero of *Mohan dāsa* is the eponymous Mohandas, who paradoxically shares a name with 'father of the nation' Mohandas Gandhi. This is a purposeful allusion on Prakash's part as it is highlighted by the narrator and emphasised by the names of Mohandas' family members, his wife Kasturi (Gandhi's wife was Kasturbai), his son Devdas (the name of one of Gandhi's sons) and parents Kaba (a nickname of Gandhi's father Karamchand) and Putlibai. Whether this allusion is meant as a compliment to Gandhi's achievements or as a derisive and veiled criticism of them is

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[225] Uday Prakash, *The Walls of Delhi: Three Stories,* trans. by Jason Grunebaum (London: Seven Stories Press, 2014), p. 43

initially unclear. Prakash both compares his hero with his namesake and differentiates them, writing that 'Mohandas looks the way he does not because of Porbandar – the place where Gandhi was born – or Kathiawar, Rajkot, England, South Africa, or Birla House, but as a result of the hunger and heat, sweat and sickness, insult and injustices in the fields and pastures, caverns and caves, jungles and marshes of Chattisgarh and Vindhya Pradesh'.[226] Far from signalling their similarity, this list connecting the relatively mobile and wealthy Gandhi to the subaltern figure of Mohandas establishes their major differences. Even as Prakash concludes that 'otherwise, all the rest is the same' in the lives of these two men, it is clear to readers that this is an ironic statement as very little else is encompassed in 'all the rest' considering the differences Prakash has already established.

Here the perspective of Hindi critic and translator Laura Brueck in her essay 'Bending Biography: The Creative Intrusions of "Real Lives" in Dalit Fiction' is instructive.[227] Brueck also locates Prakash's writing as part of postmodern fictional practice that aims to bring a new understanding to conventional 'popular historical' narratives in India, including the narrative of Gandhi's 'unquestioned greatness', a narrative which as I established in Chapter One was shared and emphasised by Prakash's predecessors such as Verma.[228] Prakash's subversion of Gandhi's legacy is a refutation of Verma's praise of Gandhi as a key Indian modernist. By paralleling

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[226] *The Walls of Delhi: Three Stories*, p. 50

[227] Laura R. Brueck, 'Bending Biography: The Creative Intrusions of 'Real Lives' in Dalit Fiction', *Biography*, Volume 40 Number 1, (2017), pp. 77-92

[228] Ibid, p. 83

the fictional Mohandas with the historical Gandhi, Prakash brings into question a central principle of Gandhian philosophy: that 'the soul of India resides in its villages'.[229] It is precisely in such a village that Prakash shows Mohandas' life being unravelled and his livelihood and identity destroyed in what can read as a challenge to the perceived moral authority and wisdom of Gandhian philosophy. By continually linking his hero with the historical Gandhi in the text, Prakash shines a light on the uneasy aspects of Gandhi's legacy, particularly his work on caste and his idealisation of rural India.

The narrative of the novella is circular: it begins at the end, with a terrified Mohandas, rejecting his own identity and begging for assistance. Readers slowly learn the facts of Mohandas' life that have led him to the predicament he is in when we first meet him. Mohandas comes from a Dalit weaver's caste and is one of the first amongst his community to obtain a college education. He excels at college and graduates at the top of his class. Yet education, which is affirmed by Dalit activists and the state alike as a key part of overcoming caste oppression and achieving social mobility in a post-Nehruvian India, is shown to be useless in *Mohan dāsa*.[230] Mohandas and his family have high expectations that his university performance will garner him a good job, possibly a government job with its promise of life-long security, including a comfortable pension. However, as Mohandas applies and interviews for possible jobs as a graduate, he realises that without connections or

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[229] Ibid, p. 86

[230] See Padma Velaskar, 'Education for Liberation: Ambedkar's Thought and Dalit Women's Perspectives', *Contemporary Education Dialogue*, Volume 9 Issue 2, (2012), pp. 245-271

money it is almost impossible to 'get ahead'. His lesser-educated peers begin comfortable careers due to nepotism, corruption and bribery. He and his family lose hope that he will be able to earn a government job but remain optimistic that he might find something in the private sector. In a stroke of luck, he is offered a position with a company called Oriental Coal Mines and he and his family believe their fortunes are about to change. As part of the application process for the job, Mohandas deposits personal documents including his university transcripts with the company.

A long wait ensues, and Mohandas anxiously contacts Oriental Coal Mines to find out when the offer will be made official and the position will start. Yet he receives no reply and is forced to accept that the job will not materialise. He and his family farm and weave baskets in order to survive. It is several years on when Mohandas makes a startling discovery. The high-caste village bully Bisnath Prasad has assumed Mohandas' identity and is now working at the Oriental Coal Mines and living in the ironically named Lenin Nagar with *his* family. The final half of the story follows Mohandas as he attempts to reveal Bisnath as a fraud. There is an investigation conducted by the company's officials but due to Bisnath's deceit and the principal investigator's corruption, it is fruitless. Finally, Mohandas is offered unexpected help from a Communist lawyer, Harshvarddhan Soni. Soni promises to fight a case on Mohandas' behalf against Bisnath. It is also revealed that the narrator of *Mohan dāsa* learns about Mohandas' varied misfortunes through Soni, who is his friend and to whom the English translation of *Mohan dāsa* is dedicated in a further occasion of Prakash blurring the lines between biography and fiction. The relationship with Soni

also underlines Prakash's enduring link with the Indian political left, even as he disavows any personal political allegiance or ideology.

Mohandas' case initially appears as though it might be successful and Bisnath and his father are arrested. Soni and Mohandas are lucky that the case appears before a judge who is honest and fair - something the narrator emphasises is exceedingly rare within the Indian judicial system - and believes Mohandas. Yet before the judgement is made, the judge is transferred. He falls ill and dies under mysterious circumstances. Bisnath and his father are released from jail and Bisnath pursues a new treachery: committing crimes as Mohandas. In a further display of corruption, the police department who are friendly with Bisnath haul the real Mohandas in to answer for Bisnath's various crimes. They physically beat Mohandas, who at this point loses any hope or optimism he might have displayed at the beginning of the novella. By the end, he is reduced to a broken man, who appears physically much older than he is, and is desperate to relinquish his identity as Mohandas and accept an identity as anyone else.

The events of Mohandas' life are continually presented in the text as more than mere personal tragedy. Mohandas is represented as a victim of Indian corruption, discrimination and deceit that is crushing subjugated people. Indian corruption is then linked to corruption on a global scale, making Mohandas' case one that can be related to victims of oppression everywhere. The relentless misfortune heaped on Mohandas demonstrates the inability of anything resembling justice or honesty to prevail in the Indian system. The narrative is told as a parable for life in modern India and an indictment both of India's elites, represented by characters such as Bisnath

Prasad, and the various corrupt officials who deny Mohandas a chance at justice,
who are shown to build their lives at the expense of Indians such as Mohandas and
his family.

Contextualising *Mohan dāsa* in the field of fiction on caste

In her essay, 'South Asian Literature and Global Publishing', Sarah Brouillette
discusses the dichotomy that exists between South Asian vernacular and
Anglophone writers and argues that this binary is reinforced by vernacular writers
themselves. Vernacular writers are likely to associate themselves with the local and
therefore 'authentic', in opposition to what is perceived as the more rootless and
cosmopolitan work of English-language writers. She quotes vernacular writers such
as Gurdial Singh and Nirmal Verma, who respectively claim that English-language
writers are likely to neglect 'the psyche of the Indian people' as they tailor their
writing to be sold in the West and that the 'real core of the Indian experience' cannot
be found in English writing.[231] Brouillette argues that while the market for South
Asian writing in English is vast with possibilities, vernacular writers are able to
capitalise on the perception that their writing is supposedly closer to the authentic
experiences of South Asian people in the subcontinent. This is an interesting
perspective to consider in relation to Prakash's writing. As previously noted, Prakash
does not shy away from drawing internationalist comparisons between the fate of

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[231] Sarah Brouillette, 'South Asian Literature and Global Publishing', *Wasafari*, Volume 22 Issue 3,
(2007), pp. 34-38, p. 35

Mohandas and the fate of those suffering elsewhere and outside of India. Prakash

typically delivers these comparisons in authorial parenthesis that punctuate the

central narrative of *Mohan dāsa*. For example, after Mohandas' father is diagnosed

with tuberculosis and becomes severely ill, the narrator interjects:

यहीं ठहरिये एक मिनट । आपको लग रहा होगा मैं के कथा सम्राट मुंशी प्रेमचंद की सवा-सौवीं जयंती

के अवसर पर समकालीन कहानी के बहाने आपको कोई सवा सौ साल पुराना किस्सा सुना रहा हुं ।

लेकिन सच तो येह है कि एसी पुरानी और पिछड़ी हुई शैली, शिल्प और भाषा में जो ब्यौरा आपके

सामने प्रस्तुत है, वह उसी समय का है जब 9-11 सितंबर हो चुका है और न्युयोर्क की दो गगनचुंबी

व्यापारिक इमारतों के गिरने की प्रतिक्रिया में एशिया के दो सार्वभौमिक, संप्रभुता-सम्पन्न राष्ट्रों को

धूल और मलबे में बदला जो चुका है । जब अमेरिका और योरोप के ईश्वर के अलावा बाकी सारे

ईश्वरों के सामने प्रार्थना में झुके हुए लोग फासिस्ट, आतंकवादी और सांप्रदायिक मान लिए गए हैं ।

तेल, गैल, पानी, बाज़ार, मुनाफे लुट के लिए हर रोज़ कंपनियां, सरकारें और फौज़ें समूची में दिन -

रात निर्दोषों की हत्याएं कर रही हैं ।[232]

Let's stop here for a minute. I bet you're thinking that I'm taking advantage of

the one hundred and twenty fifth anniversary of the birth of Premchand, the

King of Hindi Fiction, to spin you some hundred-and-twenty-five-year-old story

dressed up as a tale of today. But the truth is that the account I am putting

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[232] Uday Prakash, *Mohan dāsa* (New Delhi: Vani Prakasan, 2006), p. 29

before you, in its old and backward style, manner, and language, is a tale of a time right after 9/11, in the aftermath of the collapse of the World Trade Center in New York: a time when two sovereign Asian nations were reduced to rubble. It's a time when anybody worshipping any gods other than the god of the US and Europe were called fascists, terrorists, religious fanatics. Gas and oil, water, markets, profit, plunder: to get all of this, companies, governments and armies were killing innocent people every day all over the world.[233]

Laura Brueck argues that in these instances, Prakash is both paying homage to and challenging the legacy of the 'father of modern Hindi literature' Munshi Premchand, as he does with Mahatma Gandhi in other points of the story. Brueck draws our attention to the fact that *Mohan dāsa* was originally published in the Hindi literary magazine *Hans*, in a special issue celebrating the legacy of its founding editor Munshi Premchand; a fact that is not noted by Grunebaum anywhere in the English translation.[234] She observes that there are superficial similarities between *Mohan dāsa* and Premchand's stories, particularly those Premchand stories that focus on the lives of 'rural, poor, and sometimes also "low caste"' Indian citizens, including novels such *Kafan*, *Godan* and *Sadgati*.[235] Yet it was Premchand who was best known for introducing the 'realist aesthetic' into the Hindi literary sphere.[236] Even as

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[233] *The Walls of Delhi: Three Stories*, p. 68-9

[234] 'Bending Biography: The Creative Intrusions of 'Real Lives' in Dalit Fiction', p. 84

[235] Ibid

[236] Ibid

Prakash imitates the basic social realist contours of a classic Premchand tale of the downtrodden and oppressed, he subverts them as he subverts the legacy of Gandhi and Gandhian moral philosophy. Prakash's internationalist allusions form a key part of this subversion. At the moment when readers might comfortably assume that *Mohan dāsa* is a twenty first century parable in the vein of Premchand stories of the poor and oppressed, a 'hundred-and-twenty-five-year-old story dressed up as a tale of today', Prakash abruptly directs the readers' attention away from his rural Chattisgarhi setting to international events happening many worlds away.

On a surface level, these events, such as the 'collapse of the World Trade Center' and the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, might seem utterly disconnected to the events of Mohandas' life. Yet by interrupting the narration of Mohandas' tale with a reminder of the international events that were unfolding at the same time as Mohandas' identity was being stolen and his livelihood destroyed, Prakash demonstrates that Mohandas' plight transcends the local Indian context. Instead, through these allusions Prakash implies that Mohandas' struggle is grounded against the backdrop of the international struggle of 'innocent people all over the world' being the subject of daily violence at the hands of 'companies, governments and armies'. Readers are reminded of the epigraphs of the text that charge British colonists with institutionalising the monopoly of high-caste Indians in education and employment. When Prakash writes that 'everyone in power was a clone of one another' and that 'they all have the same skin tone and speak the same language' later in the passage quoted above, he presents a shadowy, even conspiratorial, image of global elites that can be connected to the colonial era of dominance not only in India but in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan as well, an era of dominance that continues

into the present day with the actions of neo-colonial forces such as the American military. In drawing these parallels, Prakash hints at a possible solidarity between "subaltern" Indians such as Mohandas, and other 'innocent victims' throughout the world by presenting corruption in India as part of a much bigger, more entrenched and historically complex problem with resonances everywhere.

The postmodern style of Prakash's writing further distinguishes him from social realist vernacular writers, including Verma and Shree, and is evident in Prakash's continual revisiting of the past usually through an ironic or irreverent lens to critique and deconstruct the legacies of figures such as Gandhi and Premchand. Though Verma himself lived outside of India for a decade in the Czech Republic, his writing style, whether of the diaspora in Prague or of characters in India, remains intimate and tightly focused on his characters and their lives. Likewise, Shree's writing is intensely local and intimate: even as India changes around Subodh and Sunaina in *Maī*, impacting their and their family's lives, there is limited mention of national, let alone international, politics. If we are to understand the postmodern as Hutcheon says partly as a challenge to the standards of the past including traditionally accepted historical narratives and knowledge, it is possible to read the problematisation of the narration of memories and personal histories in *Maī* as postmodern elements similar to Prakash's attempts to problematise histories of caste and Gandhi. Nonetheless Shree does not go as far as Prakash in connecting the personal struggle of her characters to international struggles for gender. In this respect, her text maintains its intimate premise as it remains tightly fixated on the lives of one North Indian family, without conflating the struggles of Mai, Sunaina and

Dadi to the suffering of all Indian women, or all women everywhere, even though this implicit comparison can easily be drawn by the novella's readers.

Both Shree and Verma, whether purposeful or not, take advantage of the perceived advantage of vernacular writing over South Asian writing in English with their focus on the local and therefore 'authentic', even as it is possible that this limits their potential to break through into the wider national or international market. Prakash meanwhile, even as he sets *Mohan dāsa* in a very precise Chattisgarhi setting, is much more willing to find the commonalities between his characters in rural Chattisgarh and in other parts of the globe. This is a partly a departure from what is perceived to be the advantage of vernacular writing but it is also a feature of Prakash's writing that makes is more palatable to an international audience whether this is intentional on Prakash's part or not. Where Kumar discusses her struggle to translate the concept of an Indian woman working in the courtyard of her house to English-language readers (to whom this image may seem 'quaint' and 'exotic') in translating *Maī*,[237] Grunebaum is instead faced with the task of translating a vernacular writer who freely borrows Western concepts and historical references, for example comparing Mohandas' fearful eyes to the fear seen in 'the faces of Jewish women, children, and old men, pressed up against the insides of the railway cars, peering out' in *Schindler's List* in the text's opening.[238]

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[237] *Mai: Silently Mother*, p. 214

[238] *The Walls of Delhi: Three Stories*, p. 46

On one level this makes Grunebaum's task more straightforward as Prakash traffics in political concepts and historical ideas that are already familiar to both English-reading Indian and Western audiences. Yet it is also true that Prakash's blunt discussion of global political events and how they relate to Indian domestic issues is couched in the language of the Indian left, with which Prakash as an ex-Communist is familiar. We can see this in the free use of English words in the Hindi original (such as 'Asia' and 'fascist', which Prakash transliterates into Hindi) as well as Prakash's description of Iraq and Afghanistan as 'एशिया के दो सार्वभौमिक, संप्रभुता-सम्पन्न राष्ट्रों', i.e. 'two sovereign Asian nations', as opposed to Islamic or even Middle Eastern nations, as they are more commonly referred to in Western discourse.

This reveals that despite the fact that Prakash disavows any particular political allegiance, he is nonetheless intimately familiar with the discourse of the Indian left, itself embedded within a larger internationalist 'third world' left movement. These politics are more evident in the Hindi original than in the English translation. In addition to this, there remain other more explicitly 'untranslatable' aspects of Prakash's fiction, most obviously his simultaneous homage to and subversion of canonical Hindi writers particularly Premchand. Western readers unfamiliar with Hindi vernacular writers will be less able to identify and engage with the aspects of Prakash's text that seek to problematise and parody both Indian national and Hindi literary histories.

Prakash's distinction from his peers is not limited merely to his break from the dominant modes of Hindi writing but also at the granular level of problematising the Hindi language itself. In his interview with Grunebaum, Prakash states that he is not

comfortable writing in Hindi and uses the extreme metaphor of indentured servitude to illustrate his relationship to Hindi as a writer:

> Writing in Hindi is like becoming a serf or a bonded labourer in a landlord's farmhouse. Learning Hindi and opting for this language to express feelings, dreams, sufferings, bliss, or anything is like working as a butler for a priest of a Hindu temple. Hindi is a tool to convert a mind to become brahmanic forever.[239]

This statement represents a further distinction between Prakash, Shree and Verma. Whereas for Shree, Hindi is a 'kitchen language' that is in fact in danger of being subjugated by English and for Verma a 'suffering language', for Prakash, it is Hindi that is doing the subjugating. Both Shree and Prakash acknowledge that using Hindi is an emotional act, with a cognitive impact upon the Hindi speaker. For Shree and her characters in *Maī*, speaking and writing in Hindi can bring one closer to the domestic sphere where the language is most frequently used in middle-class, upper-caste North Indian households and share an emotional and mental register with the women who speak it. For Prakash however the act of speaking Hindi represents entry into the mind-set of an upper-caste Hindu. Through the act of using Hindi, the speaker risks being 'convert[ed]' to an altered 'brahmanic' consciousness. While this may have appealed to Verma, given his understanding of Indian modernity deriving partly from a Hindu sense of consciousness as exemplified by modernists such as

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[239] *A Conversation with Uday Prakash*

Gandhi, we see Prakash reject this envisioning of a Hindu self articulated through the use of Hindi.

Prakash's attitude towards Hindi is not entirely atypical and recent decades have seen growing numbers of Indians voice the same opinions, particularly those whom, like Prakash, speak another language as their first language (be it Chattisgarhi, Bhojpuri or Bengali) or come from low-caste or low-class backgrounds.[240] This criticism of Hindi is one that extends to apply not only to the literary sphere of Hindi writing but also to the nation itself. As Casanova has argued, through the medium of language literature is inextricably linked to the politics of the state.[241] Together, 'language and literature … provide political foundations for a nation and, in the process, ennoble each other'.[242] We can apply Casanova's perspective to Prakash's rejection of Hindi even as he simultaneously forges his literary career in the language. It is precisely the political resonances of Hindi and the ways in which the language is perceived as being integral in the construction of the modern Indian state and the entrenchment of particular religious and caste hegemonies in Indian society that make it distasteful as a literary language for Prakash. The irony of this is that Prakash continues to use Hindi as a medium not only for his fiction writing but also for his non-fiction writing and his translations from European and other vernacular Indian writers. As Alok Rai points out in *Hindi Nationalism*, Hindi's capacity to colonise and displace minor languages (such as Chattisgarhi) in North

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[240] See: *Hindi Nationalism*

[241] *The World Republic of Letters*, p. 34

[242] Ibid

India may be why an individual who critiques Hindi dominance as much as Prakash does is nonetheless compelled to conform to it. While it is clear that through the post-realist mode of his writing, Prakash is able to convey a part of this conflict in his writing itself and problematise aspects of Hindi literary history that are otherwise unacknowledged by an upper-caste elite, it is also true that by forging his career in Hindi, his critical success ironically brings Prakash closer to that same elite for whom he expresses contempt and criticism.

While it is clear that Prakash rejects identification with the Hindi literary elite, he is also distinct from the world of anti-establishment Hindi Dalit writers. It is important to understand Prakash in relation to this subset of vernacular writers partly to understand where and against whom he situates himself in the Hindi canon. Despite his repeated attacks on caste, the cultural hegemony of Brahmin 'lit-priests' and the fact that caste appears as a frequent subject in his fictional work (not only in *Mohan dāsa* but also in his novella *Pili Chhatari Wali Ladki*), Prakash is not himself a Dalit writer but 'engages nonetheless in a political critique of caste' in his fiction, according to Brueck .[243] She adds that 'in conversation, he has explained to me his sense of isolation from the Dalit literary sphere since he does not share the same caste identity'.[244] Arguably, it is Prakash's solidarity with his Dalit peers that might explain his fierce criticism of the high-caste Hindi literary elite as well as his desire to position himself as an outlier to this elite even as he cannot identify as a Dalit author.

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[243] 'Bending Biography: The Creative Intrusions of "Real Lives" in Dalit Fiction', p. 90

[244] Ibid

While Prakash's non-Dalit background does not preclude him from writing about topics unfamiliar to him including caste, it is important here to recall the Dalit critical perspective. As Toral Jatin Gajarawala points out in *Untouchable Fictions: Literary Realism and the Crisis of Caste*, 'the central question in Dalit literature revolves around issues of realism, the real, and the cult of authenticity', which is perhaps further heightened in the vernacular, a medium already perceived as being more 'authentic', as Brouillette argues, than English.[245] Drawing upon Brueck's scholarship on Dalit literature, Gajarawala characterises Dalit literary consciousness as 'an anticasteist, antifeudal, and anticapitalist position, a challenge to traditional aesthetics, a critique of "hierarchies of language and privilege"'.[246] Yet she argues that the complexity of this model is often reduced to a debate on 'identity, authenticity, and purity' and that authors and texts are derided as being 'non-Dalit or anti-Dalit on the basis of both birth and ideology' in journals such as *Dalit Sahtiya* and *Apeksha*.[247] In evaluating Prakash's work in relation to the work of Dalit writers, I do not want to wade into the 'reductive debate' that Gajarawala highlights and trivialise Prakash's anticasteist and anticapitalist position in *Mohan dāsa* because he is a non-Dalit writer. Instead I am interested in exploring Prakash's positionality within the contemporary Hindi canon, where he himself rejects the class of 'lit-priests' but also, by his own admission, is separate from his Hindi Dalit peers. By exploring this I believe it is possible to gain a greater insight into the anticasteist and

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[245] Toral Jatin Gajarawala, *Untouchable Fictions: Literary Realism and the Crisis of Caste*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p. 2

[246] Ibid

[247] Ibid

anticapitalist position that Prakash articulates in *Mohan dāsa*, the importance of parody and irony in articulating this position and how this is received by readers and critics, both in Hindi and in translation.

Gajarawala notes that contemporary Dalit literary criticism in Hindi accounts for the nuances and details of a work, leading Dalit critics to challenge texts that appear to be superficially anti-casteist but which closer readings reveal to contain a subtler strand of casteism.[248] She points to Premchand as an obvious example as this. As previously noted, Premchand often focused on the lives of the rural poor and downtrodden in his work, usually with a sympathetic, liberal eye. Despite this, in 2004 Premchand's novel *Rangbhumi* was publicly burned by members of the Bharatiya Dalit Sahitya Akademi; a fact that Prakash would certainly have been aware of prior to writing *Mohan dāsa*.[249] Despite Premchand's broadly liberal politics, Dalit critics have challenged Premchand's primacy in the Hindi literary sphere due to what Gajarawala calls a 'poor representation of the poor': a representation that is only interested in Dalit characters to emphasise that they are 'pitiable, downtrodden, insulted'.[250] In endeavouring to represent Dalit characters in the realist mode, a writer such as Premchand inadvertently reifies the subjugated position of Dalits. The Dalit realist writer by contrast, Gajarawala asserts, intervenes by presenting 'the intersection of the exposition of social ills with the centrality of human dignity', which is arguably in some ways closer to the socialist realism that Ann Lowry draws our

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[248] Ibid, p. 6

[249] Ibid, p. 5

[250] Ibid, p. 7-8

attention to than Premchand's mode of strict realism.[251] An example that Gajarawala gives to illustrate Dalit realism is the character Gangi in Premchand's 'The *Thakur'*s Well', about whom Dalit writer Kanwal Bharti states, '"if only Gangi had fought some battle of liberation, though she may well have lost her life, but it would have become a story of the Dalit fight for recognition"'.[252] Having understood this as a central tenet of Dalit literary critical thought, it is possible to assess the extent to which *Mohan dāsa*, written by a non-Dalit writer, may or not be able to achieve this and the impact this subsequently has on the text's reception.

The somewhat conspiratorial frame that Prakash constructs in *Mohan dāsa* – that perceives its central character as one of a ruthless global elite's many victims – means that the caste oppression of Mohandas and his community is continually reified as Mohandas plunges deeper into misfortune. Despite occasional moments of optimism, for example when Mohandas is first offered the Oriental Coal Mines' position or when it initially appears as though his case against Bisnath Prasad will succeed, the narrative's trajectory is bleak. By the end when the narrator finally sees Mohandas (having previously only heard of him through Soni), Mohandas is described as being in a genuinely pitiable condition:

मेरी आंखें ऊपर उठीं । सामने से मोहन दास लंगड़ाता हुआ चला आ रहा था । उसके शरीर पर पुरानी बेरंग, पैबंद लगी पैंट और चीतड़ा हो चुकी चौखाने वाली कमीज़ नहीं, सिर्फ एक लंगोटी भर बची थी

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[251] Ibid, p. 16

[252] Ibid, p. 18

। उसके सिर के बाल गिर चुके थे और आंखों में गोल प्रेम का सस्ता-सा चश्मा लगा था । वह धीरे -

धीरे डगमगाता हुआ, लाठी के सहारे, किसी बीमार बूढ़े की तरह चल रहा था ।[253]

I looked up; Mohandas was approaching, limping heavily. He was not wearing the washed-out, patched up pants and torn checked shirt, but only a loin-cloth. His hair had fallen out, and he wore cheap round eyeglasses. He walked slowly, using a walking stick, shuffling along like an old man.[254]

Not only has Mohandas been physically broken down to the point of resembling a much older man, he is willing to renounce every aspect of his life that lent him dignity, including the reality of his father's life, his academic achievements and his very identity. He pleads:

मैं आप लोगों के हाथ जोड़ता हुं । मुझे किसी तरह बचा लीजिए । मैं किसी भी अदालत में चलकर

हलफनामा देने के लिए तैयार हुं कि मैं मोहन दास नहीं हुं । मेरे बाप का नाम काबा दास नहीं है । और

वह मरा नहीं है, अभी ज़िंदा है । ... जिसे बनना हो बन जाए मोहन दास । मैं नहीं हूं मोहन दास । मैंने

कभी कहीं से बी.ए. नहीं रहा । बस मुझे चैन से ज़िंदा रहने दिया जाय ।[255]

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[253] *Mohan dāsa*, p. 84

[254] *The Walls of Delhi: Three Stories*, p. 129

[255] *Mohan dāsa*, p. 85

'I take your hands and beg: please find a way to get me out of this. I am ready
to go to any court and swear that I am not Mohandas. My father's name is not
Kabadas and he is not dead, he is alive … Whoever wants to Mohandas, let
him be Mohandas. I am not Mohandas. I never did a BA. Didn't come out on
top of my class. Never was fit for work. Just want to live in peace'.[256]

Added to this is Prakash's choice to narrate *Mohan dāsa* from the perspective of a
detached third party, emphasising the text as one written by a non-Dalit observer
about the sufferings of a Dalit person. The metafictional aspect of the text is
emphasised by Grunebaum in his Afterword, where he relates an incident of taking a
trip to Rajnandgaon with Prakash and Soni (the text's dedicatee) and coming across
Mohandas in the flesh. Grunebaum recalls:

So I suppose I shouldn't have been surprised that as we were leaving town,
Prakash, seeing a man on the road walking toward us, said, 'Oh, there's
Mohandas.' And so it was: the man who he had based his character, looking
just as haggard and resilient as described in the story. We stopped, spoke at
length, took some photos and went on.[257]

This is a startling moment yet Grunebaum moves on swiftly. The real Mohandas'
opinions about the story are not conveyed to the reader nor is there any indication of
the possibly troubling ethics at play when representing the life of another person in

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[256] *The Walls of Delhi: Three Stories*, p. 129-30

[257] *The Walls of Delhi: Three Stories*, p. 223-4

metafictional form to be circulated far beyond their own sphere of influence. I would argue that the sum of these parts demonstrates that even as *Mohan dāsa* articulates a fiercely anticasteist and anticapitalist perspective, it is text that can be critiqued from a Dalit critical lens. There is little emancipatory possibility within Mohandas' struggle and by the end of the text, Mohandas himself is too drained to fight on for his case, removing too the potential for the 'Dalit fight for recognition' to be the central theme of the text. Indeed, *Mohan dāsa's* central theme seems to be the capacity of the Indian state to crush the suffering, subaltern subject, exemplified in this case by a Dalit character. Even if the text is to be read as a symbolic one, it is nonetheless evident that Mohandas serves as a symbol and one of victimisation rather than liberation, whose labour has been stolen repeatedly by his upper-caste oppressors. The idea of Mohandas as symbolic is enhanced by the novella's reception among vernacular readers, many of whom seem to identify with the story's eponymous hero. In the Afterword of *Three Walls of Delhi*, Grunebaum notes that Prakash daily receives 'one-rupee postcards … from admirers spread across the most forgotten corners of India' and following the publication of *Mohan dāsa*, 'many postcards simply read, 'I am Mohandas''.[258]

Yet a crucial part of Prakash's anticasteist position is articulated in the form of the postmodern parodic aspects of *Mohan dāsa*. The endless misfortunes that are heaped upon Mohandas can appear blackly comic and absurdist when considered through an ironic lens. As I have previously argued, this sense is emphasised in the

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[258] *The Walls of Delhi: Three Stories*, p. 220

Hindi original due to Prakash's winking references to canonical literary and historical figures as well as through the narrator's chatty parenthetical interjections. Prakash possesses enough self-awareness to acknowledge that, despite his sympathies, he is not a Dalit writer and may indeed be closer to the class of "lit-priests" for whom he acknowledges contempt. As Hutcheon notes, 'parody … offer[s] a perspective on the present and the past which allows an artist to speak TO a discourse from WITHIN it, but without being totally recuperated by it'.[259] With this mind, we can read *Mohan dāsa* not as a tragic tale of Dalit misfortune penned by a non-Dalit writer, but a parody of similar texts written by non-Dalit writers by a member of their class. By inhabiting this mode, Prakash is able to 'speak' to the discourse of liberal representations of Dalit suffering, without being 'recuperated' by it. Read this way, Prakash is not attempting to represent Mohandas' sufferings in the 'Dalit realist mode' presumably knowing that this will likely draw criticism from Dalit critics, who might perceive his attempts to represent Dalit suffering as a kind of appropriation by a writer who has never experienced such suffering directly. Instead, Prakash is satirising the tendency of liberal non-Dalit writers, such as Premchand, to write stories of unmitigated Dalit poverty and suffering, which unknowingly reify the very caste discrimination against which they are writing. Hutcheon is correct to state that parody has effectively become 'the mode of the marginalized, or of those who are fighting marginalization by a dominant ideology'.[260] Using parody, Prakash is able to articulate his anticasteist position from his perspective as a non-Dalit author who is sympathetic to and performing solidarity with his Dalit peers, and fight against a

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[259] 'The Politics of Postmodernism: Parody and History', p. 206

[260] Ibid

dominant ideology of caste supremacy expressed by his liberal and conservative

peers alike.

These two contrasting interpretations of the text demonstrate the different readings

of *Mohan dāsa* available to the vernacular reader, particularly the reader with an

understanding of developments in twentieth century Hindi literature and the

development of Dalit literary criticism. The non-Indian reader of the text in translation

may not have the same critical resources to draw from when evaluating *Mohan dāsa*

as a literary text and may instead be led - thanks to the novella's tendency to parallel

Mohandas' plight with international events - to see caste discrimination as one of

many forms of oppression taking place in a broad international struggle for justice.

Furthermore, without an awareness of the central arguments of Dalit literary criticism

that have emerged in India in recent decades, it is easy for texts about Dalits written

by non-Dalit writers to succeed in the international market, both in English and in

translation, and be evaluated on their own, without proper contextualisation within a

Hindi canon that includes the output of Dalit writers and critics. As mentioned in my

previous chapter, marginality has a clear appeal on the international market and the

way that caste subalternity is represented on the global literary stage is far broader

and less nuanced than in a vernacular Indian context. It is unsurprising then that a

non-Dalit writer, possessing more cultural capital than his Dalit peers, would be

nominated for an international-facing award such as the DSC Prize for his writing on

caste, poverty and corruption, before any Dalit writer was similarly recognised. This

disjunction is important to keep in mind when considering the reception of *Mohan

dāsa* in translation. Furthermore, the layers of literary references to Hindi icons such

as Premchand within the text, and the metacommentary on the representation of

Dalit characters especially by non-Dalit writers, exerts a local value that is less available to the non-Indian reader in translation, especially where the translator is not interested in representing these nuances. In order to understand the extent to which these nuances *are* communicated to non-Indian readers in Grunebaum's translation of *Mohan dāsa*, I will dedicate the final section of my study to an examination of Grunebaum's translation strategies and a close reading of the translated text.

Close reading of the text

I have suggested in earlier sections of this chapter that there is something slightly evangelical in Grunebaum's championing of Prakash on the international literary stage, and that Grunebaum's work to promote Prakash extends beyond his work as translator and far surpasses similar efforts on the parts of Nita Kumar, Kuldip Singh and Jai Ratan in promoting the work of Shree and Verma respectively. Grunebaum's labour in this respect is not without value. As Orsini points out, a translator who is famous in their own right and takes it upon themselves to translate vernacular writing as a particular passion project can have an outsized impact on the reception of those translations.[261] The example Orsini gives is of Gayatri Spivak's choice to translate the short stories of Bengali writer Mahashweta Devi, which Spivak herself discusses at length in her Translator's Foreword to Devi's short story 'Draupadi'.[262] Having been 'lionised' by a renowned postcolonial academic such as Spivak, vernacular

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[261] Decreed out of existence: Multilingual India and World Literature', p. 41

[262] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, '"Draupadi" by Mahesveta Devi', *Critical Inquiry*, Volume 8 Number 2, (1981), pp. 381-402

writers including Mahashweta Devi can have their writing featured on university

syllabi outside of India. It can also encourage the translation of vernacular writers

into other languages less hyper-central than English: for example, Orsini notes that

Devi is now the only writer translated at least in part directly from Bengali into Italian,

aside from the Nobel-winning Bengali litterateur Rabindranath Tagore.[263] I would

argue that Grunebaum's efforts in this regard have a similar impact on the reception

of Prakash's work on an international level. Grunebaum is not only a translator but

also a Senior Lecturer in Hindi at the University of Chicago, where he also teaches

Creative Writing.[264] Grunebaum's academic standing in the US as well as his own

American background mean it is unsurprising that his translations of Prakash's work

have been published by Western university presses, from UWA Publishing (formerly

University of Western Australia Press) that first published *The Walls of Delhi* and

Yale University Press, which published *The Girl with the Golden Parasol*. This in

sharp contrast to the far more India-specific range and influence of, for example, Nita

Kumar and Kali for Women.

The fact of Grunebaum's translations being published by prestigious Western

university presses exposes Prakash's work in turn to attention from Western critics

and readers, such as reviewers for *The Australian* and *The Cranberra Times* who

praised *Three Walls of Delhi* when it was first released by UWA.[265] Furthermore,

Grunebaum's championing of Prakash's work allows for entry into Western literary

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[263] Decreed out of existence: Multilingual India and World Literature', p. 41

[264] *The Walls of Delhi: Three Stories*

[265] See: https://uwap.uwa.edu.au/products/the-walls-of-delhi

magazines and outlets such as *The White Review* that Prakash, in the vernacular or translated by an Indian translator or academic resident in India, might not otherwise be able to achieve.[266] In light of this, an evaluation of the quality of Grunebaum's translation is even more important, precisely because Grunebaum serves as a key interlocutor between Prakash and Western readers and critics.

In evaluating Grunebaum's translation of *Mohan dāsa*, the first issue to consider is parodic aspects of the Hindi original. In a review for the Indian publication *The Sunday Guardian*, journalist Trisha Gupta notes that whereas the Hindi *Mohan dāsa* had a 'darkly comic, musing tone' to it, the English translation instead 'produces a powerfully despairing sense' in the hopelessness of India's flawed institutions and systems for justice. I would agree with Gupta's assessment here. It is notable that as an Indian critic who reads in both Hindi and English, she is better able to navigate the vernacular and English translation as two separate texts than the critics of *The Australian*, *Cranberra Times* or other similar Western outlets likely are. The Hindi original of *Mohan dāsa* has a comedic value that is not present in the translation, where instead the overall bleakness of the text is emphasised. Humour is a notoriously subjective and culturally specific value and it is therefore not entirely surprising that the humour of Prakash's original writing has not been carried across into Grunebaum's translation.

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[266] Uday Prakash, trans. by Jason Grunebaum, *Judge Sa'b* (2015), < http://www.thewhitereview.org/fiction/judge-sab/> [accessed 12 August 2019]

A key aspect of the original Hindi text's humour is its winking referentiality to figures from both Indian history and Hindi literature. I have noted this previously in relation to the text's playful homage to Gandhi and Premchand but it extends beyond these tributes. Within his authorial parentheses, Prakash makes pointed critiques of the current world of Hindi letters, for example identifying a particular point in Mohandas' life as being the same point when 'an elderly critic of Hindi letters proclaimed that a bureaucrat-turned-writer was the new Muktibodh, and a second old corrupt critic insisted that some paper pusher was Premchand and Phanishvarnath Renu reincarnate and rolled into one'.[267] For the vernacular reader of *Mohan dāsa*, particularly the reader coming across the text in its original location the Hindi journal *Hans*, this insight has a funny, gossipy quality, due to Prakash's willingness to attack the Hindi literary elite in the very pages that they themselves write in and read from. Furthermore, for the vernacular reader steeped in knowledge of Hindi literary culture and its latest developments, the various references to a 'bureaucrat-turned-writer', 'Muktibodh', a 'paper pusher', 'Premchand' and 'Phanisvarnath Renu' are likely to be familiar, once again emphasising the comedy and boldness inherent in Prakash's skewering the Hindi elite in one of their own magazines. However, for the non-Indian reader of English, who is not able to lay claim to this level of cultural knowledge and is unaware that *Mohan dāsa* was first published in a Hindi literary journal, these examples seem tragic rather than a funny and appear to be yet another pessimistic reinforcement of corruption and lack of meritocracy occurring at all levels in Indian society.

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[267] *The Walls of Delhi: Three Stories*, p. 104

Another instance of Prakash's comic referentiality that might escape non-Indian

readers of the translation is Prakash's naming of official bureaucratic figures in

Mohan dāsa after Hindi literary canonical figures. For example, the surprisingly fair

judge who first hears and believes Mohandas' case against Bisnath Prasad is called

Gajanan Madhav Muktibodh, a name shared by the Hindi poet Muktibodh. When the

judge makes inquiries to other officials while considering the case, the public

prospectur is called 'H.S. Parasi (Harishankar Parasi)' and the SSP of Anuppur is

'S.B.Singh (Shamsher Bahadur Singh)'.[268] Like Muktibodh, both Singh and Parasi

were famed Hindi men of letters; a fact likely to elude English-language readers

entirely, particularly if they are unfamiliar with the Hindi literary canon. A translator

concerned with signalling some of Prakash's original comical nuances and

references to his Hindi peers might have included footnotes or a glossary at this

point to telegraph to non-Indian readers Prakash's slyly comic narration. Yet, despite

a reference to the Muktibodh allusion in his translator's Afterword, Grunebaum

avoids the inclusion of footnotes or a glossary. In his essay on translation, 'Choosing

an English for Hindi', Grunebaum further clarifies his stance on using footnotes or

glossaries in translation. In a footnote he writes:

> My general rule of thumb with footnotes is that if there were none in the
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> original, I won't use any in translation. Glossaries I generally object to for two
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> reasons. One, I suspect with a bit more work, much of the information

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[268] *Mohan dāsa*, p. 123

contained in glossaries could be incorporated into the text itself with little or no disruption. Two, a glossary's presence divides the readers into two groups: one that needs to use it and the other that doesn't. It's like saying, "If you're not in on things, you have to use the glossary," which is not in the spirit of why I am translating in the first place.[269]

This is an interesting insight into Grunebaum's thoughts on translation and the purpose of translated works. Grunebaum's first assertion that 'with a bit more work, much of the information contained in glossaries could be incorporated into the text itself with little or no disruption' might be applicable to translating complicated diction from Hindi into English, for example Hindi words such as '*chamcha*' and '*swadeshi*' that Grunebaum discusses in his essay, which have multiple meanings in Hindi that are not necessarily available in English. Yet I would argue that it does not apply to allusions and references to specific cultural history that the majority of English-readers will possess little to no knowledge of. There is no way for Grunebaum within the text of his translation to point out to readers that names such as Gajanan Muktibodh, Harishankar Parasi and Shamsher Bahadur Singh are literary references. In my opinion, this can only be achieved through a paratextual intervention, such as a footnote, alerting readers to the fact that Prakash's naming conventions are not simply incidental but in fact highly stylised with a distinct purpose that will be immediately comprehensible to vernacular reader.

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[269] *In Translation: Translators on Their Work and What It Means*, p. 167-8

I would also like to problematise Grunebaum's second statement that including a glossary in translation is 'like saying, "If you're not in on things, you have to use the glossary"', which he claims is 'not in the spirit of why I am translating in the first place'. Here, I would argue Grunebaum demonstrates what Emily Apter has called 'tendencies in World Literature toward reflexive equivalence and substitutability'.[270] In this instance, Grunebaum exemplifies what Apter's has called the 'translatability assumption' of world literature when he trivialises the potential need for a glossary and suggests that inclusion of a glossary would divide readers into 'two groups'. Implicit in these statements is the assumption that any text written in Hindi (or any language as Grunebaum seems to be making a general statement) is substitutable with and translatable to something written in English. In his reluctance to admit the possibility that not all things from all cultures are universal, Grunebaum refuses to admit the inevitability of instances of 'untranslatability' arising when converting a text from one language into another, regardless of the talent or best intentions of the translator. As Apter points out, this attitude is prominent amongst a 'world literature' community of writers, critics and academics, that perceive 'world literature' as a net social and cultural good and assume that literature is transferable across all languages and borders. In his desire to avoid alienating his reader, specifically his non-Indian reader, by signalling to them that they may not be 'in on things', Grunebaum is willing to sacrifice certain nuances of the original text, including its frequent referentiality, that might only have been explained through the inclusion of footnotes or a glossary. In doing so, I would argue he shifts the tone of the original

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[270] *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, p. 2

text and creates a translation that is more sombre and pessimistic than the Hindi original. This is ironic as the very postmodern parodic mode that represented a break from twentieth century realist Hindi literature and drew Grunebaum to Prakash's writing is not represented effectively through Grunebaum's own translation.

I am not highlighting Grunebaum's unwillingness to interact with the possibility of untranslatability in order to reify the original work as the only *Mohan dāsa* worthy of readership and discussion. Nor am I suggesting that the original, untranslated text will always dominate its translated version in terms of quality. Rather I am interested in Apter's presentation of the Untranslatable as a 'linguistic form of creative failure with homeopathic uses'.[271] Even as Grunebaum is not able to entirely convert the blackly comic tone of the original *Mohan dāsa* in his English translation, he is able to construct a *Mohan dāsa* in English with a greater sense of inevitable tragedy and bleakness. India is understood by the West as a region of inequity and discrimination, yet this understanding lacks the nuances of the equality and justice discourse that is articulated in India. Western readers as a result are likely to be ignorant of the conflicting ideologies and solidarities that surround an issue such as caste in India and more likely to accept a simplified version of caste oppression, as presented by Grunebaum in translation, rather than the thornier comic version originally penned by Prakash. The latter version is clearly in discourse with anti-caste activists, Dalit literary critics and non-Dalit liberals, whereas the translation appears

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[271] Ibid, p. 20

to sidestep these parties and instead aim a more simplified version of the story to Western readers in terms they can understand.

In the original Hindi, it is possible to read *Mohan dāsa* as a parody of precisely the kind of Premchand story of the rural, oppressed and low-caste that incited the Dalit Sahitya Akademi to burn *Rangbhoomi* in protest. Even as Prakash turns Mohandas into a symbol of caste and class victimisation, the text can be read as an attempt by an anti-casteist non-Dalit writer to satirise the works of his non-Dalit peers when it comes to their representation of caste and the plight of Dalit communities. Yet in English translation, without the accompanying humour and sense of parody at the expense of the Hindi literary establishment, *Mohan dāsa* more closely resembles the kind of tale it is satirising, about a helpless subaltern figure crushed by the discrimination and corruption of Indian society. The reception of *Mohan dāsa* in translation by non-Indian readers is also less likely to problematise these aspects and less likely able to contextualise Prakash's anti-casteist and anti-capitalist position within a broader Hindi canon of non-Dalit liberals and Dalit writers articulating the same position albeit in very different ways. Here I would refer to Stefan Helgesson's hypothesis that views every new translation 'establishing not "a" text, but an expandable multilingual *textual zone*, issuing from multiple subjectivities, produced in discrete systems of publication, and constituting thereby the effective world-literary existence of a poem or a novel'.[272] The English translation of *Mohan dāsa* is a part of a 'multilingual textual zone' and it is shaped as much by

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[272] Stefan Helgesson, 'Translation and the Circuits of World Literature', p. 97

Grunebaum's subjectivities as it is by Prakash's. As Helgesson points out, this

textual zone is not 'reducible' to Prakash's original work, but it could also not exist

without it.

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to challenge the 'translatability assumption' that arises in the scholarly field of world literary studies, as well as more widely in the press coverage and critical reception that immediately engage with newly published translations. By conducting close readings of the original compositions in the vernacular and the subsequent English translations, I have highlighted that untranslatability is an inevitable reality with which translators, publishers and world literary scholars must grapple. Whereas in *Against World Literature*, Apter theorises generally across several languages and literary canons, in this project I have tested this theoretical claim through a close engagement with Hindi and English texts, drawing on my expertise in both languages. The accumulation of 'untranslatable' moments identified in the preceding three chapters subtly shift the meaning between Verma, Shree and Prakash's original texts and their English translations, creating new 'translation zones'.

This shift in meaning is not always a signal of lack of skill on a translator's part but can be a result of the translator's personal subjectivities as well as their own ideology and position taking. While Ratan and Singh's ineffectual translation of 'Kavve aur kālā pānī' blunted certain moments in the story, for example the use of English by the narrator's Westernised family, the key themes of modernity, family estrangement and the question of an ascetic spiritual life are nonetheless as evident in translation as they are in the original, though the poor quality of the translated authorial voice lends the translation less potency. Nita Kumar's interest in the feminist potential of *Maī* inevitably brought the novella's representation of gender and patriarchy more

clearly into focus in the translation than other themes of language and childhood. Meanwhile, Grunebaum transforms Prakash's blackly comic tale into a far bleaker one, representing the biggest change between original and translated text of the three case studies I have considered. As all of Grunebaum's translations of Prakash's writing have been published by Western presses, the question of Anglophone audiences' reading tastes and comprehension is of greater significance to Grunebaum than it is to say Kumar, whose translation was published by the India-based Kali for Women. The well-worn tale of Dalit oppression that Prakash mocks in his original may be recognisable to literary minded and left-oriented Indian vernacular readers but it is likely to be entirely unknown to his Western readers, regardless of their political affiliations and allegiances. Grunebaum's choice to transform *Mohan dāsa* into a more straightforward tragedy also makes the text more comprehensible to Western audiences, perhaps even reifying in their imaginations India as a place of cruelty, poverty and corruption. While this reinforcement might be looked upon with ambivalence by an Indian writer, it allows a translator such as Grunebaum to effectively perform his solidarity both with a marginalised community in the global South (in this case, a working poor North Indian Dalit community) as well as with Prakash, who Grunebaum presents as a literary maverick on the circuit of media promotion for *Three Walls of Delhi*. This example is a direct refutation of the point that translator of *The Vegetarian* Deborah Smith makes in her own defence highlighted in the Introduction: that politics and aesthetics are distinct entities in a translation. A translator's aesthetic choices are likely informed, whether they know this or not, by their own solidarities and ideological commitments.

One consequence of this is that two translations of the same text are likely to differ. A commonality that incidentally connects the three texts that I have chosen is that Ratan, Singh, Kumar and Grunebaum's translations all represent the *first* translations that have been produced of these texts however they are unlikely to be the last. Nirmal Verma, an important figure in the Hindi canon who is done something of a disservice by Ratan and Singh's shaky translation, is likely to be translated again and rehabilitated amongst English-language readers, both within and outside of India. Recent years have in fact seen something close to this as Verma's novellas have been translated and published by Penguin Modern Classics by more capable translators than Jai Ratan, such as *Ve Din* (1964) translated as *Days of Longing* (2013) by Hindi writer Krishna Baldev Vaid. Given Verma's reputation as an important short story writer, we can assume that *Kavve aur kālā pānī* will likely see another translation or amended edition of Ratan and Singh's current translation. My larger point here is that the presence of untranslatability necessarily and inevitably gives rise to the presence of multiple translations of the same text, enlarging what Helgesson has termed the 'translation zone' and giving readers and critics alike several different texts to engage with. Different translations are moulded by the personal subjectivities and ideologies that different translators bring to a work, as I demonstrated in the cases of Grunebaum and Kumar. Multiple translations of the same original text can tease out the different ideological nuances and thematic concerns, according to both the translator's own position taking as well as their understanding of the original writer's position taking. A second translation of *Mohan dāsa* might emphasise the text's parodic elements whereas a second translation of *Maī* might focus more heavily on the novella's presentation of different language

dynamics amongst North Indian families, rather than the feminist themes Kumar brings to the forefront.

An interesting consideration regarding multiple translations of the same text relates to various translations' interaction with the logic of the marketplace and awards culture, what Chaudhuri calls 'the transformative "now" of the market, in which anything can happen, and everything is changing'.[273] Chaudhuri expands on 'the market's compression of time' pointing out that this contracted 'timeline' allows for a 'subtle reframing of context and linearity' and an 'insistence on the miraculous'. On the one hand, a new translation can 'obliterate' the memory of an old one and achieve ascendance at least temporarily due its newness, as the latest translation of a text is likely to be the most widely and easily accessible at any given moment. The marketplace's 'transformative "now"' can allow new translations to succeed largely as a result of their newness as well as the logic that accompanies this newness, for example the likely greater production numbers for a new translation than an older one. Yet at the same time as multiple translations are implicated in the logic of the marketplace, they also resist its 'transformative "now"'. The publication of a new translation may push enthusiastic readers to revisit and revive old translations, assessing their strengths and fallibilities, as well as those of original text if they are able to read it. In this way, multiple translations of a text can go some way to addressing, if not solving, two of the main problems attendant on world literature in translation: marketplace logic and untranslatability.

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[273] Amit Chaudhuri, 'The Piazza and the Parking Lot: Arvind Krishna Mehrotra and literary activism'

This project attempts to challenge the 'translatability assumption' and expand upon the possibilities of the 'translation zone' by drawing attention to the subtle shifts in meaning that occur between an original text and its translation. It is an early intervention in a field that requires further in-depth and far-ranging engagement with translated literature across other languages to identify for example how the translation zone is enlarged upon when several translations of the same original text exist.

This project has necessarily adopted a tight focus on a single linguistic and regional realm: the Hindi literary sphere. While many of the themes particularly relating to marginality that I have drawn out, such as caste and gender, are widely applicable to multiple literary spheres in India, they differ across different languages and regions as some regions have seen the more rapid development of Dalit and feminist writing than others. In *Hindi Dalit Literature and the Politics of Representation*, Sarah Beth Hunt notes that the present-day 'widely recognised field of Hindi Dalit literature … began in the mid-1980s' and that 'Hindi Dalit writers … took inspiration from the Marathi Dalit literature of the Dalit Panthers', who were active from the late 1960s until the 1980s.[274] This demonstrates that literary spheres in central and also South India saw new developments and movements with regard to Dalit and anti-caste writing prior to the North Indian literary sphere. As a result, vernacular Dalit literature in languages such as Marathi, Telugu, Kannada and Tamil has made greater inroads

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[274] Sarah Beth Hunt, *Hindi Dalit Literature and the Politics of Representation* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014), p. 3

into mainstream literary awards culture than Hindi literature, demonstrated by the recognition received by writers such as Namdeo Dhasal (winner of the Sahitya Akademi Life Time Achievement award), Bama (a 2000 winner of the Crossword Book Award) and Devanuru Mahadeva (a 1990 winner of the Kenda Sahitya Academy Award in 2000 and Padma Shri recipient in 2011). Central and Southern Indian Dalit writers do not enjoy unquestioned critical and mainstream approval in India and indeed still have a long way to go in terms of achieving a stable level of recognition and success. Yet the gains made by Dalit writers in the Marathi and South Indian literary spheres, however minimal, nonetheless outstrip the gains made by North Indian Dalit writers on the stage of national literary prestige and institutional acceptance. An analysis of translated literature from the Marathi literary sphere or that of a Southern language such as Kannada or Telugu might therefore yield more sophisticated insights regarding translation and representations of caste subalternity in English versus the vernacular, due to the greater progress made in these languages by Dalit writers in comparison to a North Indian language such as Hindi.

While there are broad commonalities to be drawn between Indian literature on the international stage and South Asian literature more generally, there are also crucial differences, which I will briefly outline by way of conclusion. These have impacted on the generation and reception of translated non-Indian vernacular literature from the subcontinent. Whereas Indian literature in English 'arrived' or has 'been arriving' on the stage of international prestige since the 1980s, the 'arrival' of non-Indian South Asian writing has been far more recent. Pakistani literature in English, which has made the most impact on the international literary sphere after Indian writing, has seen its dawn only in the last two decades, with the output of increasingly well-

recognised English-language writers such as Mohsin Hamid, Mohammad Hanif and Kamila Shamsie amongst others. Pakistani vernacular writers have yet to enjoy the new surge in popularity currently being enjoyed by Indian vernacular writers through translation and wider international circulation of their work. The relative absence of state support and an infrastructure to support vernacular writers in Pakistan is partly to blame for this.

Alyssa Ayres draws a comparison between the Sahitya Akademi in India and its Pakistani counterpart, the Pakistani Academy of Letters, noting that whereas:

> [the Sahitya Akademi] is exceptionally active: … it has published more than 2,000 books in translation (from twenty-four languages), and has convened more than 6,000 programs of discussion at the national and regional level … the only measure of the Pakistan Academy of Letters' output I have been able to locate reports the publication of 150 books.[275]

The consequence of this is that even as world literature in translation has become increasingly popular in the last ten years, the focus as far as South Asia is concerned has been on Indian writing in translation. A prize such as the DSC Prize, which is open to all South Asian writers has recognised Pakistani writers working in English such as H.M. Naqvi, Musharraf Ali Farooqi, Jamil Ahmad, Mohsin Hamid, Nadeem Aslam, Bilal Tanweer and Kamila Shamsie. However, the vernacular writers

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[275] Alyssa Ayres, *Speaking Like a State: Language and Nationalism in Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 167.

in translation that the DSC has recognised have been almost exclusively Indian writers, such as Chandrakantha, Benyamin, Uday Prakash and most recently Manoranjan Byapari. I would argue that this is less an instance of the DSC overlooking the work of Pakistani writers in translation and more a sign of the comparative lack of institutional support from Pakistani gatekeepers, including the Academy of Letters as well as the Pakistani media and publishing houses, for the country's writers working in vernacular languages.

Yet in comparison with other South Asian countries, particularly Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldives, Pakistani literature is still 'ahead' in terms of its global impact whereas the literature of South Asia's smaller nations is in a relatively nascent stage. In 2001, Manjushree Thapa produced the first significant Nepali novel in English (*The Tutor of History*) and in 2005, Kunzang Choden produced one of the first major Bhutanese novels to be written in English (*The Circle of Karma*). This is a stark contrast to Indian Anglophone literature, which began to be developed over a century earlier in the late nineteenth century.[276] Today translations of Nepali literature, particularly vernacular poetry and short stories, are occurring concurrently to the development of original Nepali writing in English.[277] Furthermore, prominent Nepali English writers are producing translations of vernacular Nepali fiction alongside their own original

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[276] See: Priya Joshi, *In Another Culture: Colonialism, Culture and English Novel in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

[277] See: Sandesh Ghimire, 'In search of home – reading Nepali Literature in translation', *The Record*, June 23 2019 https://www.recordnepal.com/art-letter/in-search-of-home-reading-nepali-literature-in-translation/ [accessed 11 October 2019]

writing in English, for example Thapa's translations of Ramesh Vikal's *A Leaf in a Begging Bowl* (2000) and *There's a Carnival Today* (2017) by Nepali Indian writer Indra Bahadur Rai. This suggests that Nepali writing in English and vernacular Nepali literature in translation may begin to make inroads onto the stage of international literature prestige simultaneously. This is a further contrast to Indian writing, which saw Anglophone literature dominate for several decades before vernacular writing was able to 'catch up' and which led to an uneasy divide between Indian Anglophone and vernacular writers.[278]

Issues regarding translation, vernacular writing and the circulation of translated literature therefore have different resonances in nations such as Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives than they do in India and Pakistan. This is not only due to the different stages of development of Anglophone writing across South Asian countries but also due to the different stages of development of national vernacular literatures as well. A 2014 *Business Standard* article notes some of the struggles that Bhutanese literature has encountered as it attempts to achieve greater cultural prominence. Challenges include an oral culture that is stronger than its print culture and Bhutan's 'failure to develop its own literature in Dzongkha – its national language'.[279]

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[278] See: Aamer Hussein, 'Books: Glossed in translation', *The Independent*, 21 June 1997 https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/books-glossed-in-translation-1257040.html [accessed 12 October 2019]

[279] IANS, 'Bhutanese literature: Rich oral tradition, but few writers (Feature)', *Business Standard News*, 31 May 2014 https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/bhutanese-literature-rich-oral-tradition-but-few-writers-feature-114053100933_1.html [accessed 11 October 2019]

Similarly, Maldivian literature in both English and the national language Dhivehi has received limited scholarly or critical attention. The question of trans- or international recognition of Maldivian literature in recent years has likely been further stymied by the introduction of draconian censorship legislation in 2014, which required all literature produced in the Maldives to abide by 'Islamic principles'.[280] These examples reveal that while there are broad similarities to be mapped between the literary output of major South Asian countries including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, there are also significant contrasts to be drawn particularly between the subcontinent's larger and more geopolitically powerful nation-states and their smaller counterparts. As Nepali, Bhutanese and Maldivian literatures continue to evolve and expand, it will be both interesting and necessary to chart the development of each country's literature in both English and in the vernacular and their circulation and reception on both the national and international level. It is likely to be radically different to the circulation and reception of Indian literature, both in English and in the vernacular, and this reveals that there is significant work still to be done in order to better understand the impact of both awards culture and English translation on the very broad collection of output categorised as 'South Asian literature'. This thesis represents an initial foray into this subject but as the examples above demonstrates, there remains a great amount of scholarly and critical work to

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[280] See: Alison Flood, 'Maldives will censor all books to protect Islamic codes', *The Guardian*, 25 September 2014 https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/sep/25/maldives-censor-books-islamic-codes [accessed 10 September 2019]

be done, particularly with reference to the less well-known and less-developed literatures of the subcontinent.

This thesis has sought to enable a new way of reading modern Hindi literature in translation, one that accounts for signal moments of untranslatability, with the effect of increasing critical appreciation that translation from Hindi into English is not a moment of 'seamless border crossing' but rather one complicated by questions of ideology, history and culture. I hope that following my initial intervention, there will be further scholarly investigations into translations of vernacular Indian and South Asian literature, from languages besides Hindi, into English and how these translations are shaped by questions of marketability, marginality and solidarity between writers and translators. Future critical investigations will need to fully consider, to use Apter's words, 'incommensurability and what has been called the Untranslatable' in order to resist the assumptions of the marketplace.

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