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Samyukta: A Journal of Gender and Culture
Vol. 3 No. 1 (2018):

CONTENTS

Details of authors can be accessed at https://samyuktajournal.in/contributors-2/

Editorial

Samyukta has been deeply interested in issues related to translation since its inception. When it comes to the poetry, it is considered untranslatable by Sreedevi K Nair, who, in her article "Is Poetry Lost in Translation?" differentiates between a poet and a translator. A poet expresses her own emotional, imaginative, or intellectual apprehension of facts and experiences while in the case of a translation, the original work stimulates the translator so much that she experiences a deep affinity for the work which in turn prompts her to create a version of that experience in her language. It is true that no one can think another's thoughts or feel another's feelings exactly and in totality, but this is not what is expected of a translator either. The basic qualification that a good translator should meet is that she should be able to peruse a literary work in such a way that she can make a sensible reading of it.

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Is Poetry Lost in Translation?

SREEDEVI K. NAIR

Poetry is notorious for its quality of untranslatability. To Robert Frost, poetry itself is that which is lost in translation. But the works of great translators like Dryden, Pope, Ezra-Pound, Richard Burton, A.L. Basham, Edward Fitzgerald and a host of others have proved that even poetry is often amenable to translation. Yet, there is some truth in what Frost maintained, for some poems by their very nature have an in-built resistance to translation, as in this case for instance.

"A is for apple which lies in the grass,

Bis for beer which froths in the glass,

Cis for curry which we love to eat,

D is for dumplings which are a real "1

It is fairly obvious that such poems cannot be rendered into any other language, since there is a verbal play on the English alphabets. In some other cases, the difficulty may be posed by the strong rhyme and rhythm in the poem. As an example, a traditional rhyme for pre-school children can be quoted.

"One, two, buckle my shoe

Three, four shut the door

Five, six, pick up sticks

Seven, eight, lock the gate

Nine, ten start again."2

The translation of these lines will also be difficult for obvious reasons. But then, there is nothing to be gained by the translation of such poems. A strictly personal or language-based poem allows no translation and often requires no translation. Where there is a transcending element, where poetry tries to heighten our perception of experiences both important and trivial, there is scope for translation. When a poet exhorts the readers,

"To see a World in a Grain of Sand

And Heaven in a wildflower

Hold Infinity in the Palm of your Hand

And Eternity in an Hour."3

his words do reverberate through almost any mind that captures it. Such poems are translatable and should be translated. This is the reason why thousands of readers without Latin and Greek have enjoyed the works of Homer and Virgil. But even the translation of such poems and pieces can create any number of problems for the translator.

To illustrate this, R. Ramachandran's Malayalam poem"Ajantha" and its translation into English by R. Viswanathan can be compared. The original poem marks the occasion of the poet's visit to the Ajantha Caves renowned for its Buddhist sculptures. Thus, it is an encounter between the self-awakened to the potentialities of its imagination and the works of art that the eyes survey. At another level, it lyrically articulates the interrelationship of art and religion, reality and metaphor. Again, the mind seeks transcendence from a life of sensuous engrossment in terms of a vision lent by the Buddhist philosophy and later through art itself, which is again shaped by the spirit of Buddhism. Yet the paradox is there. The end marks the return to the sensuous and tempting image of the dark damsel and to the realization that grief is at the core of all cosmic experience. The original poem and its translation into English are given at the end of this article.

The difference between the original and the English version is very wide-ranging from the length and number of the lines to tone, syntax and even the meaning in a couple of instances. But in translation, close correspondence cannot often be considered as the only criterion for evaluation and differences do not necessarily point to inadequacies or lapses.

Michal Zeller Mayer considers translation as a "metatext or a text about a text.'4 He says: "A translation text is a metatext because the way it chooses to differ from the source text is indicative of the target text's conception of the source text in particular and of textuality in general."5 The same phenomenon had been earlier discussed by Anton Popovic as "shifts of expression" in The Nature of Translation (1970). Traditionally, original texts are believed to have around them a sort of sacred aura and the attempts by foolhardy translators to tamper with them by rendering them into other languages are supposed to be sacrilegious. But, modern translation criticism considers such "shifts" as "meta-messages."6 In that case, the additions, omissions and re-structuring of messages in target text provide information on what it cannot accept and on what it can accept in a different form. Yet, it would be worth the effort to search for the factors which create vast differences between original text and its translation when they are not made deliberately.

The difference between a poem and its translation starts right from the stage of conception. A poet writes about a particular thing or experience because his deep perception of it has strongly moved him to give it a verbal expression. Thus, it is his own emotional, imaginative, or intellectual apprehension of facts and experiences that a poet tries to express. In the case of a translation, the cause for its genesis is the existing poem. This original work stimulates the translator so much that he experiences a deep affinity for the work which in turn prompts him to create a version of that experience in his language. But he is not a person who merely collects the meaning contained in the original poem's linguistic and textual structure or who merely interprets the text's surface signs. Yet, the most frequent criticism against translation is that it lacks the spontaneity and power of the original work as the translator is trying to render the original poet's views faithfully. It is true, that no man can think another man's thoughts or feel another man's feelings exactly and in totality, but this is not what is expected of a translator either. The basic qualification that a good translator should meet is that he should be able to peruse a literary work in such a way that he can make a sensible reading of it. There are readers who point out inaccuracies as did the mathematician Babbage when Tennyson published his poem "The Vision of Sin". This incident was mentioned by. Hankin in his book Sense and Its Cultivation is very interesting. In the poem, Tennyson writes

"Every moment dies a man,

Every moment one is born"

The mathematician could not digest this and so he wrote to Tennyson that if this were true, the population of the world would be at a standstill. Since, the rate of birth is slightly higher than the death rate, he suggested a modification:

"Every moment dies a man

Every moment 1 1/16 is born".

Not content even with this modification he added a note. "The actual figure is a decimal that is so long that I cannot get it in the line, but I believe 1 1/16 will be sufficiently accurate for poetry—".Literary translation becomes atrocious when it is done by precision maniacs devoid of imagination. But when it is undertaken by a person whose interpretation of the poem clothes it in the beauty and freshness of creativity once again, it can stand as a fairly good substitute for the original. It was Eliot who spoke of the twenty-five centuries of culture living in the very marrow of the poet whose individual talent should be conscious also of tradition. Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz too speaks of a composite known as "the poet's personality"7 which "consists not simply of the individual who creates a given number of texts but rather a sort of 'common denominator' the "sum of all the poet's writings."8 The criteria which are essential for a poet should be possessed by the translator of poetry as well.

There is no point in evaluating a translation as second best simply because it is a translation. If we think on that line, we will have to admit that every art whether it is painting, sculpture or literature, is somewhere only a translation— "a translation of the original that was composed in the immanent space in the heart'9 of its creator. Perfection cannot be there in the poetry that we read, it is there only in the poet's vision. Actual poetry is that which is waiting to be born. Poetry loses much of its charm when the poet externalizes or translates into words the inner melody and the uniqueness of his vision. What is a fire in his imagination turns rather to ashes in words, though the spark may still be there. Thus, at one level even an original work of art is only a translation. K. Chellappan in his article. "The Paradox of Transcreation," says that every creation is a paradox—the paradox of "a deep inner language made outer, the recalcitrant interiority and uniqueness of vision made a universal possession and this fundamental paradox of creation is intensified in translation because here the translator has to externalize someone else's vision in some other medium into his medium…."10 Yet, this double difficulty can be overcome by dexteroustranslators creatively.

Now, there cannot be any doubt that the genesis of a poem is quite different from that of a translation. But, when we compare the original poem "Ajantha" and its translation (as is the case with any poem and its translation) the most striking difference is the change in the shape, the appearance and the aesthetics of the visual form of letters and the emotional experience associated with them. This is something which cannot be helped because during translation SLgraphology and consequently, SL phonology are inevitably replaced by TL graphology and TL phonology respectively. But even the number of lines are drastically reduced in the translation. While the original poem has seventy-three lines, the translation has just fifty-one lines. Thus, a change has occurred in the length and form of writing and this certainly changes the first visual impact that the poem makes upon the reader. Coming to the overall structure, the original poem has four stanzas of five, nine, thirty-three and twenty-five lines respectively. But the translated version of the poem has stanzas of three, four, five and eight lines besides couplets. Samuel johnson in his Dictionary has mentioned that "Stanza is originally a room of a house and came to signify a subdivision of a poem."11 If so, it can be said that the grand mansion of the original poem with large spacious rooms is re-structured into another graceful dwelling with more rooms of smaller sizes. Yet this cannot be considered as too unnecessary a meddling done by the translator. In the source language, i.e., Malayalam, it is quite possible to have very long stanzas in poems. But it will strike as odd in the TL. Edward Bysshe in his The Art of English Poetry (1702) says: "The stanzas employed in our poetry cannot consist of less than three and seldom of more than 12 verses, except in Pindaric Odes."12. The translator's ingenuity in re-structuring the original poem has thus served only to make it more at home in the TL. Thus, even objective factors of typological nature can be affected by factors of a subjective nature. In the translation of the same poem—i.e., 'Ajantha' done by T.R.K. Marar the stanza form is kept just as in the original. So, even the adherence to form is subjective. It is an indication of the translator's response to the potential features of the work as well as his knowledge of the practices in the recipient literature at a specific historical moment.

Modern literary criticism holds the view that during the process of translation, it is not the meaning that is translated. This is so because "the meaning of a poem does not reside in the poem alone, but in its relation to other poems, other forms of language and to the whole semiotic code in which the author lives. Its meaning is largely a matter of the way it confirms, nuances or subverts that code. If it merely repeats the code, it is an empty cliche; if it bears no recognizable relation to it, it is nonsense; if it does something in between, it becomes meaningful."13 But if a translator is not translating the meaning of a text, then what does he translate? He is translating only the meaningful elements of the text- the graphic, lexical, syntactic, rhetorical and formal features which constitute what the text is

and what it suggests. Thus, the form also is important, especially in certain poems where the poets make conscious use of specific forms for definite purposes. To illustrate this a concrete poem by lanHamilton Finlay is given below.

SAIL

S-_A_I_L

S_ A_ I_ L

S A I L O R14

Here, the poem has a triangular pattern, like that of a triangular sail. One can have the visual illusion of a little boat with atriangular sail coming nearer and nearer to the land, till at last one sees the sailor also standing beside the sail. In the translation of such poems, it is good to retain the shape and form of the original.

Form becomes an extension of content not only in poems which make use of few words, but this can occur in longer poems as well. As an example, E.E. Cummings's "Among Crumbling People" can be cited.

"a

mong crumbling people (a

long ruined streets

hither and) softly

thither between (tum

bling)

houses (as

the knot

wing spirit prowls, its15

Here, the whole poem gives the appearance of a crumbling structure. In poems like these, the form has to be kept at any cost as the form is also the content.

Even in ordinary poems, the length and arrangement of lines are important. Alan Maley and Alan Duff have pointed out in their book The Inward Ear that "a poem becomes a poem by being called a poem and by being set out typographically in a certain way."16 This is illustrated with an example. The words given below form a poem.

"I no longer know

who

or what

I am.

Or perhaps

I know it

only too well.

The pain swells

to a crescendo.

Pain that has nothing to do

With the severed breast."

The very same words read like prose when written as below.

"I no longer know who or what I am. Or perhaps

I know it only too well.

The pain swells to a crescendo. Pain that has

nothing to do with the severed breast."

This shows how important the form of a poem or the spatial arrangement of words in a poem is and hence proper attention must be given to these factors. As far as possible, the translator of a poem should try to retain the form. As matter and manner are inextricably bound in poetry, the meaning of a poem is not just content bound, but it is also sign-bound and hence individual words as well as their arrangement accumulate meaning. But if the translator feels that the retention of a particular form will not create the desired effect in the target-text reader then he can take liberties with the form as he thinks fit.

Thirdly, when a poem is translated, the sound of the poem and the internal and external perceptions of its acoustic beauty and the emotions attached to them are changed. The sound effect a poem produces is very important and that is why poetry makes use of such techniques as rhythm, rhyme, metre, alliteration, assonance, repetition, refrain, etc. Though no known language is without poetry and though the conventions governing the language of poetry are likewise familiar to the speakers of all the languages, it is quite difficult to reproduce any of these peculiarities into another language. In the original poem "Ajantha" though there is noregular metree, devices like rhyme, alliteration, repetition, assonance, etc. are frequently used. There is also a regular rhythm which fully matches with the theme. Yet, none of these measures are reproduced in the translation as such, as it is impossible to do so. In Malayalam and also in English, there are several rhymes. Yet, it is not easy to reproduce the SL rhymes exactly in the TL, retaining the meaning of the words. In many instances, the rhythm also is lost in the translation while the meaning is steadfastly adhered to. This affects the beauty and impact of the poem as poets make conscious use of rhythm. In the translation of a poem, the translator should try to retain the meaning as well as the rhythm and melody. This is applicable in the case of metres also. Normally English metre is stress-timed while in Malayalam it is syllable-timed. Hence, it is impossible to reproduce a particular Malayalam metre into English and vice- versa. Thus it is clear that producing an 'adequate translation' of any poem into another language is rather difficult. The concept of adequate translation was propounded by Gideon Touring in 1980. According to him, AT or "Adequate Translation is not an actual text, but a hypothetical reconstruction of the textual relations and functions of the source text (ST). Since it comprises only such features, on various levels of description, as are functionally relevant for the structural relationships with the source text and thestructure of the text as a whole, Adequate

Translation can be regarded as the optimum (or maximum) reconstruction of all ST elements possessing textual functions."17 Such elements are called"extremes"18 after Even-Zohar. Thus, an AT, includes phonic, lexical and syntactic components, language varieties, figures of rhetoric, narrative and poetic structures, elements of text convention, stylistic aspects, thematic elements etc. This is the reason why it is difficult to create an AT for any poem. And, even if one succeeds in producing an AT of a poem, it may not create the desired effect in the target audience as language is a "polysystem"19. In the source language system, phenomena such as alliteration, rhyme, metre etc. may have a particular value position. As language systems differ from one another very widely, it cannot be said that if poetic features are reproduced superficially in an identical manner in two languages, their value positions will be similar. In a vast majority of cases it may become a different phenomenon.

As for the elements which create the musical effects in a poem, only the method of substitution can be adopted, i.e., the translator should try to make up for the loss of SL metre and music with what is available in the TL. This is what is done by the translator of "Ajantha", and this is the only method that can be adopted by all translators of poetry if they are to produce almost the same effect as that of the SL readers in the TL readers. HenryGifford in his "Notes on Translation" refers to the superstitious dread felt by verse translators in altering the metrical form. According to him, every poem enacts a unique experience along a particular curve of impression and feeling in such a way that one detail precedes another. This dictates the essential rhythm expressed in a certain metrical pattern. The same pattern in a different language may frustrate the intention of the poet. Hence, the duty of a translator must be to trace the necessary internal movement in a poem, and not to part with it when he recreates the work in the TL.

Fourthly, words with their bases, prefixes, suffixes, stress, patterns of sense and their connotations are changed in translation. In his search for the equivalent of a word, the translator meets with many difficulties. According to J.C. Catford, there are two types of translation equivalence-textual equivalence and formal correspondence. A textual translation equivalent is "any TL form (text or portion of text)which is observed to be the equivalent of a given form (text or portion of text)20 and a formal correspondent is "anyTL category (unit, class, structure, element of structure, etc.) which can be said to occupy, as nearly as possible, the 'same' place in the economy of the TL as the given SL category in the SL"21. English and any Indian language can operate successfully only at the semantic level. However, semantic units are not independent of the contexts in which they are used and the qualities of form are inseparable from the meaning of the word in most of the

theliterary texts. Hence, meaning is dependent both on the contextual and formal relations of the words. To illustrate this argument several instances can be cited. (a) Some words have great suggestiveness in certain contexts and this phenomenon is something which defies translation totally. For example, consider the word "syamasundari" (line 55) in the original poem "Ajantha". The word 'syama'in Malayalam means "dark". But the word is so often associated with Lord Krishna that it evokes all the sensuousness and the mythical aura that go with the image of Krishna. Moreover, the poet had published a collection of poems under the title "Syamasundari "and "Ajantha" is the last poem in this collection. When the same word is used by the poet in the poem, it evokes certainassociations whichh are difficult to be conveyed to the TL readers. Moreover, it also suggests the poet's deep enchantment with the sculpture. (b)Some images are unlikely to have their equivalents in other languages as their perception may be outside the circle of the immediate experience of the speakers of that particular language. In line 65of "Ajantha" there is mention of "vennilavoli" which refers to the beautiful, white, serene, twilight. Such tropical attributes of the moon, its coolness etc. in Malayalam and the other Indian languages are impossible to have their exact equivalents in the temperate zones of the English-speaking countries. Though the choice of the word "moonlight" is correct as a semantic equivalent, it does not have any of the connotations of "vennilavoli". (c) Thirdly, losses in translation occur when the original words contain something more than their plain meanings. This 'somethingmore' may be found in onomatopoeia, i.e., the harmony between sense and sound, in some subtle alliteration or other such little literary devices. For example, 'calanarahitamamcalanam' produces an effect which is not there in"static mobility". In the original, the word suggesting motion(calanam) is repeated twice but the expression as a whole refers to the negation of motion. Again, "claim" by its very sound suggests movement. These effects are lost in the translation as "static mobility" is just two contradictory terms joined together. (d)Fourthly, trouble arises for the translators when a word in the source language has more than one meaning and when both these meanings together add different dimensions to the poem. For example, in line 22 of the original, there is the word' nityata' which means both 'eternity' and 'God'. The second meaning, i.e., the suggestion regarding God, would not strongly present itself to the mind of the target-text reader while this will very much influence a source-textreader's interpretation of the poem, for R. Ramachandran has another poem "Under the Shadow of Divine Sorrow" in Malayalam in which he associates God with eternity and loneliness. During translation, it is difficult or rather impossible to find TL equivalents which have all the meanings, or which carry all the implications of a SLword. In the translation of such words, therefore, losses inevitably occur. But as Theodore Savory says, in almost all poetry there is"the vision that prompts the poet's thoughts and which he tries to show us and to share with us.

The poet has seen or heard or otherwise experienced something that we might never have known but for his poetry."22 If the translator can recapture and communicate this experience by faithful and simple translation, then he has succeeded.

In the translation of literary works, it is not enough if these semantic meanings of words are presented faithfully because a crucial problem of creative translation is not the non-availability of equivalent lexical terms or semantic structures in the target language. These problems are quite general and nothing can be done about them except overcoming them by recourse to approximation.

For example, for many lexical terms in Indian languages, it is impossible to find exact equivalents in English. Further, even when an equivalent is found, the connotations of the two may be different. For example, in the original poem 'Ajantha" there are the lines

"Nindelilayilnicirikyumbo-

lenumvelicamparakkunnu."

Here "Lila" is much more than "play" which is the target – text equivalent.

Sometimes translations acquire dimensions which are not intended by the original poet. For example, lines 32-39 in the translation of "Ajantha" describing the lascivious damsel leaning on "a gold-enamelled pillar transports the reader to the indestructible world of Keats's Grecian urn. The "ever-virgin" of 'Ajantha' can very well be compared with Keats's 'Beauty' who for ever will "be fair". The permanence of the sculptured figure in the Ajantha Cave and art in general is emphasized by the distant echo of Keats'sstrong assertion of the same fact in his poem, "Ode on a Grecian Urn". Thus, not only losses but gains also can occur in translations. This is why Myriam Diaz- Diocaretz has remarked that the translator produces not a "derivative text",24 but "an equivalent text which will produce other readings in the RT".25

Next, the relationship between words, the arrangement of words in sentences etc. are changed in translation. The words in a work along with their arrangement, determines its style. The translatorbefore doing the work of translation must determine the originalauthor's style and then shape his style accordingly. Eventhough thetranslator correctly grasps the style or tone of a work, it may not bealways possible for him to reproduce it precisely. English is a language which ordinarily places its subject at the

beginning of sentences. The word order of sentences is normally subject, verb,object. In languages like Malayalam, if necessary, the subject canbe placed anywhere in the sentence depending on the stress or emphasis given to the word. For example, the first reference in theoriginal poem "Ajantha" is to "sunyata" (emptiness or nothingness).

This image of the eternal void echoes the tone of the entire poem.On the superficial level, it suggests the deep emptiness, the cooldarkness and the impregnant silence that exist within the cave. Butthis effect is reduced in the translation as the "void" is mentionedonly as the last word in the first stanza. In some cases this change inword order can become an insurmountable impediment, whereasnormally it causes only a shift in emphasis as is the case with theexample given above. In his article "Translation as LiteratureThree,"26 K.V. Thirumalesh brings out the difficulties posed by thedifferences in syntax between the SL and the TL by referring to astory in Greek Myths by Robert Graves. Narcissus is so handsomethat whosoever looks at him falls in love with him at first sight. Buthe rejects all offers of love. Echo is one of the several women inlove with him. She secretly follows him, wherever he goes. Onaparticular day, Narcissus gets separated from his companions in theforest. Realizing that he has lost his way, he calls "Is anyone here?"

Echo is only too glad to respond to him. But unfortunately, she wasunder a terrible curse from Hera. Echo can only repeat what otherssay. So she repeats "here". Then Narcissus calls "come" and sherushes out to meet him. But he rudely shakes her off and says:" I will die before you ever lie with me." Seizing this wonderfulopportunity to make her point, she repeats the last part of the sentenceand pleads, "Lie with me." As Thirumalesh points out, this conversation is impossible to be translated into many of the Indian languages including Malayalam. This is because in these Indian languages the subordinate clauses can occur only on the left of themain clause. To overcome this kind of serious difficulties, the translator must have real ingenuity.

The translation of metaphors, proverbs, idioms and phrasesalso pose problems to translators. Many Indian idioms and proverbs do not have equivalents in the English language. Hence, whatis usually done is substituting the TL idioms and proverbs havingmore or less the same meaning for the SL ones. This can happen inthe case of adjectives as well. For example, in line 62 of theoriginal poem "Ajantha", there is the phrase "Aksayanandam". Theword "aksaya" brings to the mind of an average SL reader wordslike "'aksayapatram" (Draupadi's vessel which by a boon of LordKrishna could satisfy the hunger of a number of people and stillremained full) and hence evokes a feeling of something ethereal andheavenly. But as the RL equivalent of this word which is

"eternal"cannot raise any such associations, the translator has deliberatelychanged the adjective to "amaranthine". Amaranth is a mythicalheavenly flower of unfading beauty and fragrance. Thus, throughthe adoption of this image, the translator tries to acquire at leastpartially, the heavenly grace and glory suggested in the original.

Gideon Toury in his article "A Rationale for DescriptiveTranslation Studies"27 mentions six ways of treating a metaphor.There are four source-oriented methods such as (1) metaphor intosame metaphor (2) metaphor into different metaphor (3) metaphorinto non-metaphor (4) metaphor into 0(i.e. complete omission) andtwo target-oriented approaches such as (1) non-metaphor into metaphor, and (2) 0 into metaphor. The last two mentioned ways can actas "compensation mechanisms"28 by which the translator can enhance the beauty and impact of a translated work obeying the rulesof the target system. The translator of 'Ajantha' has, in the instancecited above, added considerably to the beauty of the translationthrough his ingenuity.

Finally, the meaning of the text and the culture that goes withit are changed in translation. The customs and conventions in onepart of the world are widely different from those in another. Besides, a language is undoubtedly the reflection of a particular culture. Thus, the element of culture is often a major impediment intranslations. In his book Culture, Language,Text, Fredrik Chr.Brogger illustrates the interrelation of culture, language and literature as in the following figure.29

This graphic illustration reveals that language, literature and cultureare interdependent. Kathy Mezei has asserted that there is more tothe translation process than the hermeneutic encoding and decodingSteiner speaks of; we must consider the factors as well which influence the production of meaning in the source and target texts; wemust consider the function of both the source and the target texts.

That is, the translator must consider three referentialsystems— the particular system of the text, the system of the cultureout of which the text has sprung and the cultural system in whichthe meta-text will be created.30

In this sense, translation is intersubjective communication aswell as inter-semiotic mediation. Culture creates problems for translators because a particular language will have words only for whatis experienced by the speakers of that language and not for anythingelse. For a culture specific word in the SL, there may not be acorresponding word

in the TL. On the other hand, there are instances of language affecting and moulding thoughts and culture.As Alan Duff pointed out in his The Third Language (10), it isnatural for the English speakers to see the limbs as being dividedinto legs and feet, arms and hands while by the Yugoslavs thesedivisions are not perceived as they do not exist in that language.'Noga' stands for leg and/or foot, 'ruka' for arm and/or hand.

Cultural interferences are minimal in the case of languageswhich happen to be in prolonged contact with each other. Theselanguages will develop over a period of time, a large number ofcommon words and translation equivalents that facilitate the smoothtransfer of meaning from one language into another. This is the casewith Malayalam and English. For example, certain mystical andphilosophical concepts in the Indian languages do not have corresponding terms of comparable depth in the English language. Manysuch words of Indian origin have found a place in the Englishlanguage and they make the translation of such concepts rathereasy. In the translation of the poem "Ajantha", in line 10, the word'karma' is used as such, though it is not an English word. At thesame time, the word is supposed to be intelligible to an averageEnglish reader.

Eugene A. Nida in his article "Implications of ContemporaryLinguistics for Biblical Scholarship" has advised "lengthening ofthe text …. (and) supplementation of the text by certain marginalhelps which will provide the necessary background information indispensable to a proper understanding of the text'31in the translation of culture specific passages. This becomes an unavoidable necessity in the case of words which are bodily lifted from the original. In the last line of the translation of "Ajantha'', there is theword 'tathagatha', which is another name for Buddha or a Buddhistsaint in the SL. This word is retained as such in the translation. Foran average TL reader, the word may need clarification. Again, theconnection between the Ajantha caves and the image of Buddhamay be clear to most of the SL readers while it is better to providethis background information to the TL readers. This is so becausethe image of the Buddha is the central image around which the cosmosof the whole poem revolves, though his name occurs only in the lastline of the poem.

Translation, no doubt, can do much to create contacts between cultures. Casagrande has gone to the extent of stating that, "Ineffect, one does not translate languages, one translatesCULTURES."32 Several strategies are employed in the translationof unmatched elements of culture in differentlanguages.Borrowing, definition, literal translation, substitution, lexicalcreation, omission and addition are some of the common procedures. Building in redundancy is also widely used by translators. Inthe original poem "Ajantha"

there is the usage “janmantara-sauhrdasmaranakal”. This single compound word is rendered intwo lines in the translation.

“The memories of intimate ties

In lives other than this”

This is an instance to show how the translator can reduce considerably the effort the TL reader has to make by stretching and thereby diluting the message. During this process, an information is raisedfrom the level of an implicit to an explicit one. According to Nida.any message has two dimensions, namely length and difficulty. Whenan author writes, he will design his message in such a way that itpasses through the channel capacity of the receptors. But when atranslator tries to render the same message literally from the sourceto the receptor language retaining the length as such, then the dimensions of difficulty may become very high in certain cases. Translators do make use of redundancy or lengthening at times, so thatthe translated message poses only the same amount of difficulty tothe TL receptors as was posed by the original message to the SLreceptors. While explaining redundancy Nida and Taber quotes theremark of an African who said that

This is just what a python does when he kills an animal hecannot swallow: he coils his body around the animal, crushesit and thus squeezes it out long and thin so that he can swallow it. The meat and the bones are all there. They are just in adifferent form.33

The translator uses this method to make swallowable theunswallowable portions of the text.As the author and the translator belong to two different language-culture communities, a “cultural-filter”34 will have to be inserted bythe translator at times. The application of the cultural-filter maynecessitate a re-programming of certain textual elements or theircomplete omission. In line 36, of the original poem, there is thedescription of the distant sounds of the cosmos heard within thecave very feebly like the painful writhing of a dying dove hit by adart. The image of the dove when used in connection with LordBuddha will necessarily remind an average SL reader of the well-known incident in the boyhood days of Lord Buddha35. But the significance of this story is likely to be lost on a TL reader. Hence,the translator has filtered out the image of the dove and hasreplaced it with a more general term “bird”. What is not crucialto a text can be omitted if the translator feels like it.

On the whole, it can be said that the translation of 'Ajantha' isdone efficiently and using Catford's terminology it can be describedas a "total translation"36 in which SL grammar and lexis are replaced by equivalent TL grammar and lexis with consequential re-placement of SL phonology and graphology by (non-equivalent) TLphonology and graphology. An exception to this rule is the lastword in the last line of the translation where the "TATHAGATHA" is transliterated and bodily transferred. Thismethod is usually adopted when the translator feels that the entireconnotation of an original SL lexical item is impossible to be evoked by any equivalent term in the TL. This aspect of the translationmakes one feel that the translator fulfils the criterion that a goodtranslator should be an ideal reader besides being an acting writer.He has grasped the full significance of the specific linguistic code(here, the word "Tathagatha') in the SL cultural system and to projecthis interpretation of the lines in which the image of Buddha loomslarge, the word is written in capital letters in the translation. This isa strategy adopted by the translator to make the prospective readersaware of the centrality of the image of Buddha. Decisions aboutsuch strategies and selections begin in the course of the translator'sreading phase and are realized during the writing-phase. During thisphase motivated by his own cultural and ideological presuppositions and his specific interests and objectives, the translator givesthe readers hints or points from which to interpret a work. This ispermissible because now it is generally agreed that the translatorcan even "change the meaning of texts"37 It is argued that, "thefunction of the translator is traceable as strategy: the reader's response may be modified or directed to areas of discourse that havenot been designed by the author, thus altering completely the meaning intended in the text'.38 Here, the translator does not adopt thisextremist view-point but has rather adopted a middle-of-the roadapproach, which was advocated by Joost Van den Vondelwhotranslated into Dutch Grotius's play Sofompaneas (1635). It is however interesting to note that the image of "Tathagatha" or Buddha does not figure at all in the translation of the same poem intEnglish done by T.R.K. Marar. The last stanza of that translationreads like this:

"The undying happiness of my soul lies

Merged with the lovely lotus in your hand.

Could they be sad, my dear,

Those memories of love in lives gone by

That the cool breeze awakens in my heart

On misty nights under a faint moon

I know not;Nor in my eyes does gleam

The melting sympathy

And the smile it generates."

This serves as a very good instance to prove the essential truth ofcontemporary reader-response criticism which fully recognizes thereader's active participation in the meaning process and holds theview that "a text is not a linear monologue of an absent author readby a passive audience."40 Hence, while the first translator on reading the last stanza of the original poem felt that the lines gavecapital importance to the image of Buddha, the second translator didnot even suspect the presence of the image in the very same lines.That is why it is said that a translated work always remains theproduct of the combined perceptions of both the poet and the translator. A translator as long as he has some consideration for thework he is undertaking, will be speaking for himself as well as forthe writer he is translating. Thus, he will be at the same timewithdrawing into his own subjectivity as well as moving out toidentify himself with his author.

All literary translators face almost the same problems and hencethese problems may arise in the translation of prose as well. Any-how, the listing of the problems which may arise in the translationof poetry makes one feel that poetry is not totally untranslatable as it is commonly supposed, though the act of translating a poem requires the genius as well as the artistic talent of a poet in the translator. There may be differences between a poem and its translation,but that need not necessarily be detrimental to the poetic effectpossessed by the work. There can occur not only losses but alsogains in translation. Besides, no language is likely to lose anythingby receiving the translation of any work from another language. Itwill only be a bit richer for it. And, as for Robert Frost's toofabricated statement on poetry and translation it is time we altered it- 'Poetry is not what is lost in translation, it is what can be recreatedin translation.'

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Haiku In Malayalam: Reading Ashitha

VARSHA BASHEER

Abstract: Haiku, the Japanese mini poems set in three lines, following a 5,7,5 syllable structure, had enchanted the Malayalee from the 90's onwards but none had successfully mastered the craft of achieving the poignant precision of Haiku, until Ashitha tried to use the form for her poetical expression. This paper tries to look at the intricacies of crafting Haiku in Malayalam and analyses select Haiku poems of Ashitha.

Key Words: haiku, malayalam, Ashitha, translation, poetry

Ashitha (1956- 2019) has written over twenty works in the categories of story, poetry, novel, children's literature, and translation. She is also hailed as a genius in Malayalam translation literature. Ashitha won the Edassery Award for her work Vismayachinangal in 1986 and the Lalithambika Antharjanam Memorial Literary Award in 1994. In 2000, she won the Padmarajan Award for 'Thathagatha'. She also won the State Sahitya Akademi Short Story Award in 2015 for her book 'Ashita's Stories'(Ashithayude Kadhakal). She has also received the Thoppil Ravi Foundation Award among many.

This paper is focusing on haiku by Ashitha as she helped attracting Malayalees attention to the Japanese poetic form of Haiku, first through her translations and later Original Haiku in Malayalam. Haiku, is an unrhymed poetic form consisting of 17 syllables arranged in three lines of 5, 7, and 5 syllables respectively. Another significant feature was its reference to nature. The haiku first emerged in Japanese literature during the 17th century, as a terse reaction to elaborate poetic traditions, though it did not become known by the name haiku until the 19th century. Influential early haiku poets included Yosa Buson, Kobayashi Issa, Masaoka Shiki, Takahama Kyoshi, and Kawahigashi Hekigoto. Outside Japan, Imagist writers like Ezra Pound and T.E. Hulme wrote haiku in English.1

Later haiku also underwent changes with changing times and in the 19th century, haiku subjects expanded beyond natural themes. But the haiku remained an art of expressing

much and suggesting more in the fewest possible words2. Ashitha's haiku poems experiments with both these variations, the former and the later quiet beautifully. Brevity being the soul of this poetic mode, Ashitha never compromises, as she is known for crafting the most soulful yet brief short stories.

Tracing haiku's influence in India, Satya Bhushan Verma in 1991, published a study Haiku in India,3 where he remarks that though Indian literature has had its own strong traditions it has always adapted western literary forms with enthusiasm. Verma also remarks how many early translators of Haiku in India never maintained the structural and metrical precision of the form, only translating the meaning conveyed. While agreeing that metrical precision while translating from one language to another with vastly different metrical structure and grammatical rules, could be difficult, as Sreedevi K Nair notes in her Is Poetry Lost in Translation4 sensible translators who are indeed concerned of carrying the whole effect of the SL into TL would definitely find ways to do justice to both form and meaning. Ashitha was keen on introducing literary works in other languages to Malayalam through translation. She translated the poems of the Alexander Pushkin into Malayalam. She had also published a collection of Haiku translations. This paper does not delve with these translation's per se but would be looking into the metrical differences and adaptations of the form in Ashitha's original Haiku works in Malayalam. Her Haiku poems were first published by Green Pepper publica in 2014 and later Mathrubhumi books republished it in 2018.

In the foreword to the book Ashitha mentions how she started composing Haiku and explains how brevity is its soul. "Haiku presents a slice of your heart. There is a difference in Stories and Haiku. If a story is written to get away from oneself, a Haiku presents itself when one is totally absent."5 These words also throw light on the spiritual tremors which can be vibrantly felt across her oeuvre. She continues:

"It is only three lines that are written; but a thousand and more is conveyed and the interconnectedness of this world and the nether and its beauty is revealed to the reader. That is when the three lines of Haiku dawns in one's conscience, like the 'All' encompassing steps of Vamana.!

It is the raising of oneself to a novel plane of consciousness"6

There was a collection of most popular Haikus from Japanese literature translated and published with a foreword by V.T. Abdurahiman in 2011 titled "Cheevidukalude Cheviyil

Paadunna Gayakar"(Singers Singing in The Ears of Crickets).This book had Haiku by early masters like Matsuo Basho, Yosa Buson, Kobayashi Issa, Chiyoni, Ryunosuke Akutagawa and many more. It also carried illustrations and brief bio notes of the poets. As Verma notes in his study of Haiku in India, with less access to the Japanese language it was translations that introduced the genre and these translations did pave wave for the enthusiastic reception of the original Malayalam attempts by Ashitha. Haiku written originally in Malayalam has been true to the genre only rarely, most missing the metrical precision and composing short verses and publishing it across social media platforms tagging it as Haiku. Here, it is necessary to note as observed earlier, that the metrical difference between Japanese and Malayalam do play a role in posing this difficulty. In short, haiku in Malayalam is not possible by following the rules of the Japanese language. The traditional Japanese Haiku poem in three lines has two images and a conclusion that clinches a comparison. Ashitha's poems also largely conform to this pattern .7 And leaving aside the 'syllable' structure, we can see Ashitha takes advantage of the limited possibilities and still brings the beauty of haiku to the Malayalam language.

Some have tried using similar word numbers instead of syllables (Three words in the first line, five words in the second line, three words in the third line) and though Haiku in original does not play to rhyming words, some have tried bringing in rhyme words and to lend rhythm. Instead, Ashitha gives importance to metrics as far as possible and concentrates more on the impact of the implosion of meaning, that can be achieved through limited number of words.

Critic Sreejith Perunthachan, in an analysis of Ashitha's short stories observes:

Her stories are like borewells,taking so little space outwardly; but boring in deep. Poignant loneliness, in its most piercing facet exists in Ashitha's stories, like a pencil sharpened to its best…She started looking for the armour of spirituality to help her beat her loneliness that life provides a woman. Naturally, her search took her to Tao, Laotsu, Rumi, Vachanam Poetry to Haiku and Meera Bhajans and to Guru Nithya Chaithanya Yathi and no wonder she dappled in adapting the Puranas for kids.8

Even a casual reader could sense that the same pervades her Haiku deeply. Poignant sensibilities, sharpened even more to fit into the three lines of a Haiku; revealing a world of emotional turbulence and at times spiritual zen like calm. That is the decisive charm of Ashitha's Haiku.

She was bedridden, battling cancer when Mathrubhumi released her Haiku collection in 2018, and in her note9 read aloud to the audience during the book release,she had written: "Though they are Haiku, they have more semblance to Zen poetry." In the same note she quips: "One of the most difficult challenges in writing is saying what you have to, in the least number of words". But a look at her Haiku will divulge how she overcomes this challenge masterfully. A few pieces are translated and reproduced here.10 The themes, as observed regarding her short stories, pertain to women's lives, love or lack thereof, and often nature and spirituality. True to the poetic tradition, her Haiku 'expresses much and suggests more in the fewest possible words'. Here the given poem Of Life (Jeevithathekkurichu) in three brief sentences expresses the passing of emotional phases and suggests more, in throwing light, on the cyclic seasonal quality to every phase whether be it immense joy or despondent sorrow that chips away at you.

Of Life

Some days bloom in boisterous joy

Some silently wither away

There are seasons to life, obviously!

Housewife

Day nor night, throughout, without break

Slaving like an ant

An average housewife

House wife, (Veettamma) makes one ponder at the unchanging pace and rhythm of a housewife slaving away at her chores, and by using the simile of an Ant, we are by visual imagery made to feel the insignificance, accorded to her actions by the world around her. To the Wind (Kaattinnodu) traces the turbulence of memories.

To the wind

Memories, like dry leaves in a whirlwind

You have uprooted me, oh wind!

today you are my unliked Beau.

Her spiritual Haiku's sparkle even more bytheir brevity, and by their subtle references; which holds much vast meaningful traditions and myths, that invokes deeper meanings.

God's Haiku

Vamana's three foot, the squirrels three stripes

Thrice disowned, thrice avowed; resurrection on the third day forth

…all your magnificent haikus! Oh lord!

By referring to the aithihya of Vamana the enormity of what a Haiku could contain within a three 'foot/ line' poem is so concisely and by association to the myth brilliantly conveyed. And the aithihya motif is extended using the reference to the squirrel's three stripes, carefully bringing in Rama's benevolent acknowledgement of small deeds, and the 'three' again repeats through the biblical reference to Christ being rejected and then avowed, and the story of resurrection is brought in. She twines these in one fell swoop in just two lines and marvels on God's play with 'three' and places lord as the master creator of haiku, in the third and closing line! **A beyond brilliant exposition of the idea of Haiku, using a Haiku.** And it also becomes a praise to lord on a spiritual plane. This stands proof to why Ashitha could grip Malayalam readers to take note of Haiku.

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*All Malayalam excerpts used in this article including Ashitha's Haiku, has been translated by this author.

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The Olfactory as a Metaphor: ReadingSujatha Bhatt's 'The Stinking Rose

HEMA NAIR R

Abstract: Sujatha Bhatt's poetry has this visceral feature which proves that she is a poet of exile and that she feels the binary opposite tug of language and culture. This paper analyses Sujatha Bhatt's collection of poetry 'The Stinking Rose' looking at binary opposites and the tension between cultures, that inform all of Bhatt's poetry, investing it with power and force. Her use of Olfactory images as metaphors are discussed in detail as they play a significant role in bringing her text to life.

Key Words: poetry of exile, longing, olfactory, metaphor, culture, Sujatha Bhatt.

For me, poetry is a place where there are tensions and contradictions in the language and also in the things being discussed. So, yes, I feel that poetry is a place where things can be questioned and examined (Sujatha Bhatt. 'Interview with Sujatha Bhatt' PNR)

Duality is central in the poetry of exile, a tension between the longing to belong to the motherland and the need to live and exist with happiness in the land of exile. This is evident also in the use of language – the mother tongue and the tongue of the adopted land. To Sujatha Bhatt, a poet born in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India, brought up mainly in the United States and now settled in Germany, her journey through continents and cultures have certainly left its mark. Bruce King calls her 'a permanent exile', 'a citizen of the world', and 'a traveller' (King 2001: 329, 330) When she moans that she has lost her tongue in 'Search for My Tongue, she proves once again that she is a poet of exile and that she feels the binary opposite tug of language and culture that she, as an immigrant Indian poet, feels in an alien culture.

You ask what I mean

by saying I have lost my tongue.

I ask you what you would do

if you had two tongues in your mouth,

and lost the first one,

the mother tongue

and could not really know the other

the foreign tongue…

The ultimate victory is however that of the mother tongue for contrary to the assumption that the mother tongue would 'rot and die in (your) mouth', it grows back:

…a stump of a shoot

grows longer, grows moist, grows strong veins,

it ties the other tongue in knots,

the bud opens, the bud opens in my mouth,

it pushes the other tongue aside.

Everything I think I have forgotten,

I think I've lost the mother tongue

it blossoms out of my mouth…

Bhatt is not just bilingual – she is poly lingual for she knows and speaks at least five languages – Gujarati, English, German, Spanish and French and desires to be fluent in many more.

Each language offers a different perspective on life, a different way of organising the world. I find it tiresome and simplistic when people claim that one language is absolutely 'better' than another (Bertram)

Binary opposites and the tension between cultures inform all Bhatt's poetry, investing it with power and force. It draws the reader in, forcing her to participate in the poet's experience. Her poems are a field of force, kinetic models, a configuration of energy or vortex of returns and repetitions. Recurrent images are quite the order of the day in Sujatha Bhatt. This article is a study of one poem of Bhatt entitled 'The Stinking Rose, which is the title poem of the collection The Stinking Rose brought out by Carcanet in 1995. Other poems in the collection also look at the stinking rose or the garlic from various perspectives. In her interview with Bertram, Bhatt says that she consciously avoided writing about her childhood in the collection for she wanted to write about other topics and a different sort of book altogether. Yet India, if not the poet's childhood is very much evident in the collection. The Indian perspective is evident in the poem 'A Brahmin Wants the Cow to Eat Lots of Garlic'. The poet examines garlic as a taboo food for Brahmins who can only lay claims to have consumed it if the cow that yields him milk, the one wholesome food he can have in plenty, has feasted on garlic.

So he can drink

the garlic-rich milk…

To the uninitiated in Hinduism, it is believed that garlic and other members of the genus Alliumincluding shallots and onions have sprung from the minute droplets of blood that had fallen to the earth from the blood of the only two immortal asuras of Hindu mythology, Rahu and Ketu. The legend goes that when the ocean of milk was churned and the amrith, the nectar of immortality was recovered, the devas went back on their pact with the asuras and wouldn't share, for making the demons immortal would compound the ills of the world. However one wily demon put on the guise of a deva and drank the month. Lord Vishnu, who was dispensing the amrith, realized what had happened and cut his head off with the sudarshan chakra but as he had already consumed the drink of immortality, he was indestructible and continues to plague mankind as dual entities. While his head was cut off a few drops of blood fell on the earth and sprouted as the genus of Allium, the garlic, onion and shallots. As traditional Hindus eat only what is offered to God and what subsequently is considered prasad, there is a clear division between varieties of food which corresponds also to the three gunas. Thus there is Sathwic, Rajaswic and Tamasic food. Onion and

garlic are considered non Sathwic because it stems from the asura's blood fit only to be eaten by demons and are taboo for Brahmins and Jains. Onions and garlic are considered undesirable by ancient Indian theories of medicine as well as by yogic and spiritual beliefs. They were considered to cause mental and physical dullness, have sedative or soporific properties and stimulate bile and heat.

In another of the poems in the collection, 'Garlic in War and Peace', the poet examines how garlic is used as an antiseptic in times of war.

…they dabbed garlic paste

over each wound –

such endless wincing

and endless those white cotton bandages…

The stench of pus and garlic gives way finally to

…pink skin

shiny as a freshly peeled clove

of garlic…

Ultimately the poem brings together an image of a garden where there are lilies, garlic and roses. Moreover the roses were sprayed with garlic – water for the only war in times of peace was the war against worms.

The association of the garlic with sex drive is focussed on by the poet in the first part of the poem. The first stanza of the poem is of the use of garlic in peace times, over and above its use as an insecticide. Or rather, the use a particular couple made of it. Their penchant was for green garlic with large purple cloves which they rubbed along their lower backs as 'a slow cleansing' 'a secret bite, their strongest aphrodisiac'. The erotic nature of the first part of the poem was according to Bhatt, not difficult to write.

They were written spontaneously, impulsively with a great need to write them, need to break certain silences surrounding female sexuality – but without any audience in mind… (Bertram)

The East and the West meet in the poem, 'It has not rained for months'. The quote with which the poem begins anchors it within the Western tradition, especially medicinal remedies for the authority of Hippocrates is invoked in the use of garlic to test a woman's fertility. Yet Eastern nuances in the text begin with the invocation of the heat and dust and dryness of the tropics which is also a metaphor for a waste land of sterility, childlessness and despair. Multiculturalism, as a way of negotiating the everyday reality of the poet, though not a theme, is as clear in the poem as double voiced-ness for, though the poem begins with the objective voice of science, it continues in the subjective voice of a childless woman who is made to keep a pod of garlic inside her. Moreover this act of nurturing the clove of garlic inside her vagina is repeated

and then Imust keep this clove

of garlic inside where my flesh

has become so raw

that it hurts- It has not rained

for months…

The experiencing 'I' suffers dust whipped up by the wind, her throat and chest hurt, she is hot and sticky and cannot breathe. To cap it all 'he' comes with his cloves of garlic, his 'garlicky' smell, his thorn sharp beard andhis face of stone. He opens her mouth and she is forced to repeat the act of putting the clove inside her flesh. Repetition brings to the fore the pain the woman experience for she longs for the rains or even that she would bleed to 'soothe the garlic scrubbed cuts…' The image of the lady watching the crows pick at the stolen seeds and his remorse signify other reasons for her childless state that remain unsaid but scream for attention. The powerful language used to highlight the suffering of the lady as well as her longing for the rain acts also as metaphor for happiness, solace and fruition.

Bhatt's poem, 'The Stinking Rose', the title poem of the collection, unlike the otherthree poems I mention which are also in the same collection, veers more to the West than the

East. The tension within the text is as much between cultures as it is between the fragrance of the rose and the foul smell of the garlic.A lot of Bhatt's poems have been called 'strikingly visual' according to Bertram, a statement to which Bhatt is in total agreement as her answer proves: 'I've always been a visual person and I've always been interested in art. I used to paint and draw a lot during my teenage years.' (Bertram). But the collection,The Stinking Rose, is rich in olfactory images as its name suggests. It beginswith the assertion that the very title encompasses all the poet wants to say about it. The second line specifies that she is referring to cloves of garlic.

In the first two stanzas, Bhatt invokes two literary allusions to two different literary genres – poetry and drama. The garlic is described as shining pearls still warm from a woman's neckand instantly recalls to life Carol Ann Duffy's poem,Warming Her Pearls and at the same time affectsa link between the texture and the appearance of the pearls and the peeled garlic. The second allusion is of course to Shakespeare, specifically Romeo and Juliet where Juliet dismissed the significance of a name. The poet states that her stand is clearly the opposite. Bhatt's contention is that the name 'stinking rose' is evocative for it conjures up an image of the garlic that is subtly exotic and alluring:

What's in a name? that which we call a rose

By any other name would smell as sweet…

But that which we call garlic

smells sweeter, more

vulnerable, even delicate

if we call it The Stinking Rose.

In line thirteen, the poet specifies that she is talking about roses, smells and the art of naming.

Everything is in that name for garlic

Roses and smells

and the art of naming…

The thirteenth line, thus, returns the reader to the very first line of her poem, only in this line she states what she meant by ‘everything’.

In line nine, before she goes on to explore the nuances of naming, the poet wonders if the reader is aware that garlic is often planted near coral coloured roses, presumably to force the rose petals to give out a stronger perfume. The garlic and the rose are placed in close quarters not only in the garden but also on the table for if the roses are on the table to enhance its attractiveness; the garlic is in the salad to increase its flavour. The poet goeson to say:

This garlic will sing to your heart

To your slippery muscles – will keep your nipples andyour legs

from sleeping

In a sudden volte face, the poet calls the garlic, fragrant. In a starkly synesthetic image the poet states that, ‘they noted it reeked under the microscope’ nor is it the first time she uses the device of synaesthesia in the poem. In line 6 of the poem she describes the smell of garlic as ‘a round smell’ and goes on to query:

Are you hungry?

Does it burn through your ears?

The second stanza of the poem is of the poet’s seemingly disagreeable task of peeling the garlic:

My fingernail nudges and nicks

the smell open…

But, in the last stanzaof the poem, it is ‘his’ fingers that are tired after peeling and crushing the garlic. The total spectrum of smells –the fragrance of the roses, the round smell of the

stinking roseand 'her' very own smell come together and seemto reach out from the text itself.

The stylistic competence of Bhatt is evident in how the various images and beliefs that is associated with the garlic are brought together. The image of the blood 'fragrant with garlic' alludes to the belief that the smell of garlic repels reptiles and vampires and which is as much apart offolkbelief as it is of Gothic literature. Binary opposites and tension between cultures is as evident as is thetension between the literary elements of the poem and its non-literary registers, especially in the use of the pronouns in the poem. It begins with the perceiving, observing, objective 'I' who states that

Everything I want to say is

in that name…

The speaker seems to be the poet herself. In the second stanza of the poem, in line five, 'My fingernail nudges and nicks the smell open…', also affirms that the speaker is the poet who is peeling the garlic but in the last stanza of the poem, in line 32, it is 'his' fingers that are 'tired after peeling and crushing' the stinking rose. The last two lines of the poem also bring in the third person feminine:

Still in the middle of the night his fingernail

nudges and nicks her very own smell,

her prism open—

In the distance between the first person singular and the third person singular is the second person 'you' in interrogatives like 'Are you hungry?' (Line7)''Does it burn through your ears?'(Line 8) or addresseslisteners as 'You who dined with us tonight' (Line26)'your slippery muscles' Line28) 'your heart' (Line 27) 'your nipples and your legs' (Line28). The third person plural plays its own role too for the 'they' in line thirty one, refers to someone tantalized by the smell and who is intrigued enough to examine it under a microscope, recalling the Victorian men in Duffy's Warming her Pearls, who were intrigued by the intangible fragrance of the lady, for the smell of the servant girl who warmed the pearls for her adored lady underlay the fragrance of the lady.

….I dream about her

in my attic bed, picture her dancing

with tall men, puzzled by my faint persistent scent

beneath her French perfume, her milky stones… (Warming Her Pearls)

Speaking of the poetic voice in her poems, Bhatt says:

…So to some extent, from the beginning, I have a sense of the poem as being 'other' from me… I feel connected to more than one voice and each voice is 'true' in its own way. No matter how autobiographical a poem is I feel that once it is published, it has a life of its own, separate from mine… (Bertram)

which is perhaps one way of resolving the voices in the poem.

The poem, 'The Stinking Rose' is saturated with images and verbal constructs that are sensuous and even covertly sexual. The sexuality becomes evident in specific words (nipples, legs, fingers) and moves on to less physical but more figurative sensuality in referring to 'nudging nicking fingers in the middle of the night'(Line 34, 35).

While the only simile in the poem is that which compares the garlic to pearls still warm from a woman's neck'(Line 4), adjectives abound in the poem. They range from compound words like coral-coloured to those like slippery, fragrant and sticky, used to describe roses, muscles, blood and cloves of crushed garlic. Perhaps it is past participles that are used most effectively in the poem beginning with the title itself – stinking, tasting, reeking, peeling, crushing.

'The Stinking Rose' brings into focus the change of attitude that could be affected by merely changing the name. If the use of the word 'garlic' only recalls to mind a repulsive breath and a foul smell, very much evident in 'It has not rained for months', the use of thephrase the stinking rosemakes it interesting and tantalizing and to quote the poet 'vulnerable,even delicate'. The self-conscious nature of naming transforming the garlic to the exoticor the unfamiliar is reflected also in the spectrum of olfactory images the poem provides, ranging from fragrance and sweet to the 'reeking' discovered under the microscope. Olfactory images in the poem being analysed are different from those used by

Bhatt elsewhere, especially in the poem 'Muliebrity' where the smell of cow-dung, fresh and dried, pervade the text. Olfactory imagesare certainly used by the poet in great measure to bring her text to life.What is different in 'The Stinking Rose' is that the smells that pervade the text are scintillatingly multi- pronged. 'Her prism', with its spectrum of sensory experience ranging from colours to unique scents of the woman, is invested with kinetic energy that lies in wait to pull the reader into a vortex of sensory experiences ranging from the overt or the surface level of the poem to its deeper covert levels of the sexual. The naming comes into play with the transformation from 'I' to 'her' and the entire poem moves to an end which is no ending at all. The final impression the poem leaves the reader is not of separable parts but a coherent whole that resist closure- as its very last word, 'open', reiterates.To use Bhatt's own words:

The structure or the form of the poem and the rhythm, cadence, meter, tone, diction, syntax within the poem all come together with the subject matter. The poem comes out as a piece, as an organic unit, if it's going to work…

Like the blended identities and the polyphonic voices and like the syncretic way of writing she displays with great effect, Bhatt's poetry, like most twentieth century poetry is eclectic and draws on various sources and pantheons which coexist with tension in the text and retain its inner harmony.

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From Sonnet to Ghazal: The Poetic Muse of Jeet Thayil

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Abstract: The sonnet and the ghazal are two traditional forms of poetry that are grounded in thematic and musical structural unity. In contemporary times, both forms have undergone alterations to keep with the demands of the times, freeing themselves from the stringent generic norms, to expand the horizon, so to speak, both in subject matter and structure. For Jeet Thayil, poet, musician, performer-poet, novelist, the fascination for the sonnet and the ghazal seems to derive as much from the predominant musical aspects in these forms as from their strangely liberating rigidities. This paper analyses the style and content of select sonnets and ghazals from Jeet Thayil's Collected Poems, to comment on the adaptability of the form to reinforce nuances of emotion.

Keywords: sonnet, ghazal, sonnetto, metapoetic, structural unity, rhythmic structures

The sonnet, a traditional and popular poetic form of European origin derived from the Italian sonnetto, a little song, best serves to capture emotion succinctly within its generic parameters of fourteen lines, set rhyme scheme and thematic stanzaic organization. In subject matter, the compact form of the sonnet "can range from 'light conceits of lovers' to considerations of life, time, death, and eternity, without doing injustice to any of them" (Encyclopedia Britannica 1). The ghazal, another popularform but of ancient Asian origin, isa poetic vehicle ideally suited to express pangs of love and separation. Typically composed of five to fifteen syntactically and grammatically self-contained couplets, thematically unrelated to one another except for the structural unity that stems from the patterns of rhyme, repetition and rhythm, it resembles the Petrarchan sonnet in the rigour of structural elements like two-line stanzas, rhyme and refrain rules etcetera.Though of ancient Perso-Arabian roots, the ghazal has acquired a cosmopolitan underpinning in contemporary times and "has effectively transcended and transferred the culture of its origins and made itself at home in vastly different cultures and times" (Hashmi, 22). It has

opened up its thematic boundaries to accommodate a wider range of issues beyond the traditional thematic axes of love and religion."A mixture of sacred, profane, romantic, and melancholic elements are frequently stitched into the ghazal's poetic fabric. Many ghazals revolve around the theme of lovers' separation," remarks Chambers (1).

For Jeet Thayil, poet, musician, performer-poet, novelist, the fascination for the sonnet and the ghazal seems to derive as much from the predominant musical aspects in these forms as from their strangely liberating rigidities. In Thayil's sonnets and ghazals, theemotional force flows forth unimpeded – it violates and makes mockery of the stringent generic rules. In a review of the Collected Poems, Arundhathi Subramaniam remarks, "While Thayil revels in sonnet and ghazal, the poetry also reveals a capacity to segue between the spoken voice and lyric impulse, between the wild and the bravura. There is a skilful ability to modulate scale, to nuance the emotional chords" (The Hindu Online). This paper analyses the style and content of select sonnets and ghazals from Jeet Thayil's Collected Poems, to comment on the adaptability of the form to reinforce nuances of emotion.

Thayil comparesthe nature of the ghazal and the sonnet in his sonnet "Dear Salil,"and hints at the vogue of these two popular forms in contemporary times, especially in the virtual world:

For I too am taken by it, the bittersweet honey and gall

Of the ghazal, its whisper and bite on the worldwide web.

If the sonnet is an English rose, the ghazal is Arab,

hooves moving at the speed of light on the worldwide web. (5-8)

In a meta-referential interpretationof the sonnet in "Dear Editor," Thayil confesses why he likes writing sonnets and highlights the fluid nature of the form that writes itself:

Well, one, I like the way it leads

you by the hand down the stair

of the page, leaves you resting on air

as on an armchair, while someone reads

to you the words you want to own.

Two, I want to say something about bliss.

I like bliss, and if I had to narrow it down

to a couplet, I'd narrow it down to this:

You start with a line and follow it through,

the sonnet writes the sonnet, not you. (5-14)

Thayil experiments boldly with conventional rhyme and rhythmic patterns and alters the forms to emphasise the scope for structural freedom in poetry. In masterly instances of inter-generic hybridity, he casts many of his ghazals in the mould of sonnets and infuses the sonnet with ghazal-like passion. The sonnet "Ghazal," echoes a classical ghazal in the lamentation of separation from love and the underlying tender yearning for the warmth of love. The subjectivityof the experiences and the musicality of alternate lines ending in the selfsame word render a lyrical aspect to the ghazal-sonnet:

When you leave you'll take what I remember of love.

Summer will feel like the December of love.

From forest fire to flicker in a matter of weeks,

What will be left but an ember of love? (1-4)

In the sonnet "Malayalam's Ghazal," which replicates the structural form of "Ghazal," the poet rues the loss of the native tongue in a humorously self-deprecating tone:

When you've been too long in the rooms of English,

Open your windows to the fresh air of Malayalam.

Visitors are welcome in The School of Lost Tongues.

Someone's endowed a high chair in Malayalam.

I greet you my ancestors, O scholars and linguists.

My father who recites Baudelaire in Malayalam.

Jeet, such drama with the scraps you know.

Write a couplet, if you dare, in Malayalam. (7-14)

The ghazal poet typically "presents himself as a solitary sufferer, sustained by brief flashes of ecstasy, defined by his desperate longing for some transcendent object of desire. This object of desire may be human (female or male), divine, abstract, or ambiguous; its defining trait is its inaccessibility. Naturally such a subjective, introspective, deeply emotional poetic stance is well suited to lyric poetry" (Faruqi and Pritchett 111). Many of Thayil's ghazals manifest the self-reflexivity typical of the lyric. Thepatternof rhythmproduced through a studied and seemingly artificial repetition of a single wordcaptures the tedium,tone and tenor of contemporary existence.In "Blue Ghazal," the word 'tonight' strikes a beat like a pounding on the distressed soul. This poem captures an emotional nadir of the poet, a painful moment of self-doubt and loathing:

Give up your pen—you won't make a rhyme tonight.

The moon's cursed. Words are unsublime tonight.

Nobody's to blame, the note said nothing more.

I'm nobody; my love's not worth a dime tonight.

…

Self-loathing, thy proper name is poverty—

…

Broken moon, of broken blue and white china,

Only you are less hopeful than I'm tonight.

Jeet, why are you hungry when your bowl is full?(1-4, 11, 15-17)

Sara Lodge writes, "The sonnet was a form framed for self-reflexive meditation on the constraints and pleasures of form itself" (533). Accordingly, many sonnets treat the sonnet form or the sonneteer himself as the central thematic focal point. This motif is evident in Thayil's poetry too. In "The Sonneteer," the poet qualifies himself as 'famous;'yet there is a playful irony in the portrayal of his success:

I was famous, I won the Hawthornden prize.

Girls flashed me. One said, 'You're the poet, right?

What a godawful waste it would be, otherwise.'

I told her my talents would not last the night,

and it was a waste, you bet, any which way.

She said, 'Poetry boy, I don't give a damn.

I've got time to kill, make a sonnet for moi.'

'She hawks her beauty in the night,' I began,

and stopped, unable to motor my mouth. (1-9)

In keeping withthemany improvisations and crossing of boundaries that define Thayil's poetry, the theme typical of the ghazal is reiterated in a sonnet. "Separation's Sonnet," which is ghazal-like in sentiment, encapsulates the pangs of separation. The poet pines for what is lost through a trigger of associative memories:

What are you doing, what improvised thing?

In a borrowed room your cell phone rings,

each ring measures the floor, the rungs

of your dream. Holding, I ask how you sing,

and for whom. To imagine the bed you're in,

the vertiginous smile that will break him,

the man whose roses bleed at your window.

To want is to wait, as I do in the place I know,

my breathing loud and single as the room,

its smell of spider dust and old perfume.

Each small thing lasts longer than the shiver

that is life. I fix the remembered instant:

you on your feet, singing, shaking a river

of salt from our shared overheating skin. (1-14)

Eagleton views the sonnet as"a poetic form of conscious literary art more disposed to the reflective than to the song type of the lyric" (150). Thisruminative aspect of the sonnet is reinforced in many of Thayil's sonnets. For instance, "Self-Portrait," delves into the dark and murky abyss of the poet's soul, to lay bare the sense of sadness that characterises his life. AKafkaesque sense of existentialist hopelessnesslies at its very core:

Unhappiness is a kind of yoga, he tells himself

each morning, a breath meditation; besides,

do you want to be happy or do you want to write?

…

A mountain moves and nobody notices. The world

is old and set in its ways, and K. is saying, Of course

there's hope, there's always hope, but not for us. (1-3, 12-14)

The sonnet acquires a surrealistic flavour in "Quiet and Concerned with Provenance:"

Around the room, the names I did not know

grew into their faces like the flies.

The names, the faces grew like the flies, so

I grew too. Buzz was my new sound. My eyes

magnified, scraped to insomnia glass,

I went to the pitiless father and son

who froze the water into place,

whose boredom melted it down. (1-8)

Even a sonnet like "The Parrot of Happiness" belies the promise of the title and visualises no escape from the monotony and boredom of life:

He clicked the afternoon's fine

weaves one colour at a time.

Colours like a delicatessen.

No room for delight or precision,

just big opinions droned

for hours, in a rude baritone. (5-10)

"Suicide's Sonnet" reflects the darknessand despair that the poet's soul experiences. The poem symbolicallyindicates thenihilism that plunges the persona into the depths of despondency:

Like someone who comes home late

to find the furniture rearranged,

I'm stepping lightly on my paws

…

why did you dismantle the fire alarums?

Why does the night sweat the sheets?

Why is the kitchen full of weaponry?

Why do I return, now more than ever,

to the window high above the street? (1-3, 10-14)

Again, in the sonnet "One Morning at the Cattle Fair," the poet reveals a deeply disturbing sense of emptiness:

One strange dawn in Ajmer,

he woke by a mist-made river,

found himself neighbour to herds of

elephant and buffalo, and

newer horses never ridden.

At water's edge he looked

backward over his life and found

no trace of habitation. (7-14)

The speaker of the sonnet "Why Should You Believe Me?" is an agnostic soul that cries out:

How can we be sure he was among us,

when the signs speak only of his absence,

the garden denuded, stones washed clean

of blood, the story ended as if he'd never been? (1-4)

In a classic act of inversion, Thayil's scepticism paves way for an avowed faith in the divine in the sonnet "Found Poem," thereby illustrating the many personae the poet is capable of adopting:

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down

in still waters.

He leads me to green pastures.

He restores my soul and helps me walk

in the path of righteousness, for his own sake.

And, yea, though I walk in the valley

of the shadow of death I shall fear no evil. He

comforts me with staff and rod,

provides me with wine and bread.

In the presence of mine enemy

goodness and mercy enter me.

You anoint me with oil, my cup

overflows. You lift me up. (1-14)

What emerges out of the foregoing discussion and illustrations is an indication that literary conventions change to address new and varied cultural demands. Jeet Thayil's seemingly odd juxtaposition of the sonnet and the ghazal best illustrates the adaptability of the sonnet, the modern temper of the ghazal, and the appeal of the two forms across cultures. The innovative use of these poetic forms by a sensitive poetic mind has resulted in a fascinating blend of contraries, of hope and despair, of faith and doubt, and of love and separation.

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The Prattle and the Pillar of the Church: The Many Selves of Eunice DeSouza

KUKKU XAVIER

Abstract: The paper reads Eunice de Souza's poetry alongside the trajectory that India as a nation has grown and come into its own. The ways that the personal becomes a testimonial for the political and the social is also of interest in the poems of de Souza. The imaginative elasticity of the poet that stretches to include the bio-participants beyond the human, is an interesting pointer to ways that poetry can bring about a more intense consciousness and inclusivity.

Keywords: Indian poetry in English, non-human participants, Eunice de Souza, A Necklace of Skulls, India, Nation and Imagination

Indian poetry in English has often been seen as a genre with a refracted genealogy. The imitative grooves struck by the early poets was seento be continuing as more and more poets left Indian shores to pursue an education and then, a profession abroad. The need of the day was perceived as literature that sought to discuss the concerns of the nation in the diction of the common man. However, the poetry being written was often of a timbre that was more Western, more alien in its outlook and landscape. The tone suggested an outsider peering in or an insider who was far removed from the grit and dust of India.

But the fifties and sixties saw a turnaround in terms of the semantic and political expressions in poetry, wherein, themes, more Indian in nature, reflecting concerns about urbanization, identity crisis, social, cultural and regional cartographies began to make a strong impact. The personal became actively articulated and so did the regional aspects of Indian landscapes. These selves, increasingly fragmented, painted a picture of not just a person coming to terms with themselves but also that of a nation grappling with a multi-lingual past. This past, which was mostly imaginary, found itself in conflict with the heady

pace of a Nation that was trying to race to its destiny by rejecting any appendices of the colonial era.

The resultant disillusionment or disenfranchisement felt by sections of 'Indians' became a major theme in the poetry of the time.

Take for instance, Eunice de Souza's lines from Catholic Mother from her first collection of poems Fix

India will Suffer for

her Wicked Ways

(these Hindu buggers got no ethics) (3)

These words are often associated with those who saw themselves as culturally distinct from the vernacular India that emerged post-Independence. An India that had no place for the culturally, socially, linguistically liminal, whose ways of life reflected "unhomed" selves (Bhabha). The Anglo-Indians in particular, and the Parsis, often caricatured in Hindi cinema of the sixties and seventies, found themselves not factored in the participatory political developmental vocabulary of the time. The country that was divided along linguistic lines saw the formation and propagation of states that set forth their agenda of regional pride, regional literature and regional histories. But these were people without a nation- in that sense of the term. The image of the carousing Anglo-Indian, with their frequent mixing in of men at the end of sentences, the quintessential secretary or railroad worker, people of 'foreign origin'- and hence 'lax' morality- began to set in the Indian imagination with the rapidity of plaster of Paris. Films such as Bobby,Julie– which then went on to be made in quite a few Indian languages did not help the cause either.

The lack of political clout, the fading presence from public spheres of life, the incompatibility of life in a rapidly changing civil society created a yearning for a life that was rooted elsewhere, in a land where they would not be out of place, or to cluster in groups, seek comfort in numbers. Works such as 36 Chowringhee Lane, the novels of Rohinton Mistry etc, with their sense of alienation, of fading histories being overtaken by

a bright, brave new world of many vernaculars or the energies of a new-born nation, flexing its muscles serve as testimonies.

To slot Eunice de Souza as a chronicler of this disenfranchisement and alienation is to be rather unjust and limited. Instead, one must consider her as a poet who brought to the page, the many selves, the many concerns about what it means to be alive in a world that is rapidly slipping away and taking with it, the stories, the people one knows and leaving in its place, memories that are complicated and labyrinthine.

In school

I clutched Sister Flora's skirt

and cried for my mother

who taught across the road.

Sister Flora is dead.

The school id still standing.

I am still learning

to cross the road.

The Road,

(for Deepak Ananth)

De Souza has constructed whole worlds out of these and other concerns, and is often called a confessional poet- along the lines of Plath and Das. The very associations that come with the word Confessional are problematic. The automatic assumption of a compelling impulse to speak up, to open up, be up close and personal pervades the word. The religious undertones of sin, atonement, expiation, salvation lend their own weight as well. The

confessional male poet is apparently different from the confessional female poet. Bruce King observes,

There are elements, whether formal, narrative distance or tonal, of self-protectiveness in the male poets. By contrast- the women poets—Kamala Das, de Souza and Silgardo—increasingly strip away such self-protection and create a world of what appear direct self-revelations. The feeling of unmediated, freely associated expression is, of course deceiving. The poems of the women writers are in their own ways as well constructed as those of the male writers; but the constructions are different, since the women map a psychology of contradictions, humiliations and defeats rather than self-assertions and triumph. Their assertion is of the self in its more characteristic female roles in relationship to father, mother, social restrictions, love, marriage, underdogs, the poor and defeat. (134)

The problem with this statement is that it creates neat demarcations into which 'women' writers ought to place their works into. It is expected that their 'confessional' poems will be of a higher degree of excoriation and come from a place that is more deeply experiential and relative to their life stories. From a political feminist (is there any other kind?) perspective, it seems as though going the extra mile to extract the last bit of oneself to infuse one's poetry with is what passes muster as poetry by 'women'. The 'male' brings into his poetry, the sorrow of loss accompanied by street noises and political and philosophical musings. This assumption is laid to rest in the very intimate poetry of Jeet Thayil and Vijay Nambisan, among others, who are unafraid to reveal their vulnerabilities or at the very least, have the poetic courage to imagine the personal in very intimate terms.

Eunice de Souza is not a poet one can easily, dismissively categorise under 'confessional, femalepoet'. She is many things at once. There is a very critical eye at work in the presentation of the everyday, the exotic and the erotic. The politics of her works originates in her 'Goanness'- employed with the same devastating effect as the linguistic comedy of Nissim Ezekiel's Goodbye Party….and The Professor. There is an intense consciousness of a sense of unfamiliarity in the Gaze directed towards and by others.

My students think it funny

that Daruwallas and de Souzas

should write poetry.

Poetry is faery lands forlorn.

Women writers Miss Austen

Only foreign men air their crotches.

(My Students, 17)

The reverse happens as well:

My Portuguese- bred aunt

picked up a clay shivalingam

one day and said:

Is this an ashtray?

No said the salesman,

This is our god.

(Conversation Piece, 14)

Says Bruce King,

The Goan satires were among her early poems in which she appears a nationalist; she rebelled against a stifling, crude religious and family upbringing by, in reaction, identifying with the poor, the Hindus and India. This stage was followed by a larger awareness in which, Hindu India, as well as the Goan community is repressive towards women. (157)

What must also be read into these exchanges is the preponderance of faith and the doubts it entails. De Souza comes through as a seeker who looks for a God as a question for the answers she has. The conventionalities of religion, the rituals and rigours of the religious

establishment do not appeal to her sense of the aesthetic as she looks under rocks and personal shrines, such as those belonging to Alleluia D'Souza.

'May the bread turn to

scorpions,' says the parish

priest. 'The people miss mass

but not St. Antony's.'

The bishop says, 'Alleluia

is a good soul. She donated

a Frigidaire last year to the

orphanage.'

(St. Antony's Shrine,10)

The pilgrims seeking God make their way through winding roads that start and end at the self- the figure of authority- the God rock- sits implacable, unmoving, answering prayers at will as he surveys the endless ant-queues that are his devotees. In Pilgrim she asks,

The red god rock

Watches all that passes.

He spoke once.

The blood-red boulders

Are his witness.

God rock, I'm a pilgrim.

Tell me—

Where does the heart find rest? (48)

This train of thought continues in God Rock where the questions of time, immortality, and the possibility of annihilation looms large over he seeming permanence that is all around us.

There's a continent moving

Under my feet, god rock.

In a million years

It will swallow the seas,

Spew out mountains,

Reduce this land

To a handful of gravel.

Give us a sign, god rock.

A city burns. (85)

The tone of the conversation- half supplication, half- conversation suggests an intimacy that is reminiscent of George Herbert's Collar. The god figure in his response seems grave, full of purpose, demanding and giving.

The idea of an ideal Christianity is something that de Souza explores towards an ironic effect. The intersecting lines of Church, the faithful and those clean, absolute lines that are drawn by people thanks to an absolute belief in their own righteousness make for a very acidic statement in terms of the ways they look at the human condition that is subjected to a judgmental, sanctimonious gaze. The word Christian, the ideals of charity, the clergy are

all looked at with an abiding sense of sadness at the shortness of the scope of their vision. de Souza seems regretful of people's narrowness as they interpret piety, devotion and God.

The poet mocks the unshakeable faith that is invested in the institutions of religion, as is seen from the case of Alleluia D'Souza.She regards Christ's bleeding heart with a mix of healthy skepticism and regret at the inability to claim a certain state of innocence with entails complete trust and thereby, security.

I wish I could be a

Wise Woman

smiling endlessly, vacuously

like a plastic flower,

saying, Child, learn from me.

(Bequest, 88)

The society that de Souza forms in the context of the Goan- Catholic permutation is also imbued with the same sense of devastating irony. The inability to comprehendvulnerability as they rush to conclusions and create a canopy of insularity is easily identifiable as that myopia which afflicts most Indian communities.

'Imagine, she hasn't visited her mother

for three days!'

'What kind of daughter.'

Simple Christian sentiments,

simply kindly people who

plait the neglected mother's hair,

fetch her a glass of milk,

ring the bell for recalcitrant nurses.

(General Ward, 89)

Of course, no mention of de Souza's Catholic poems can be complete without Catholic Mother with its acidic portrayal of the erasure of female autonomy in the meganarrative of religion. The foregrounding of the father-figure and his piety and dedication to the Church by sheer dint of number of members (seven children) he has contributed to the Parish is enough to elevate him to being the Pillar of the Church. The idea that the family- any Catholic family- but in particular, this proliferating one is representative of the Holy Family and is an objective corelative for a "Good Catholic Family" is delivered very kindly, innocuously and then blown to bits by the last line, "the pillar's wife/ says nothing" (3)

This sense of irony continues in Feeding the Poor at Christmas when the idea of the selfless giver and what charity means is examined ruthlessly under a microscope. The conversational tone of de Souza's poems, in particular in such poems brings the same powerful impact as Robert Browning's dramatic monologues. But it is This Swine of Gadarene that is extraordinary in its idea of autonomy. The poem speaks for those that are on the periphery of larger narratives where they are mere props or collateral damage. The poem is about a certain swine from Gadarene into which Christ drives in a demon. While the rest of the similarly possessed swine hurtle down a cliff, this swine decided to stop a while and eat a mouthful of grass. It places an entirely new perspective on the biblical idea of Free Will and also makes us take a re-look at the dispensability of the non-human in the Anthropocene world that we seem to be creating around us. The non-human or the human who is seen as less than some others are subjects that are subalternised by attaching a significance to the well-being of those humans who seem to 'matter more'. De Souza calls attention to the Word that announced that the world and all its treasures have been created for the pleasure of Man alone. The tarrying swine thus, is an act of the non-human writing back- a subversive reading of the way the entire herd is imagined to have leapt off the cliff uncomplainingly, just because it suited the Son of God.

Memory is a key component in the poems of de Souza- be it a communal memory- a memory shared by an entire community or a personal one, her words ring sharp and true.

The sense of loss that comes through steadily losing the grip on an existing, populated world- is presented in excruciating detail. The turbulence that often governs mother-daughter relations, the understanding that generally comes too late, the search for an absent father, the endless conversations in the head with a series of lovers- all are etched in painstaking detail. De Souza looks critically, dispassionately at old age, but it is the loss of memory that worries her- the fear of becoming a dotty old woman. These and other details occupy the landscape of her poems, especially those from Dangerlokand her later poems. The image of two parrots, pets to- presumably- the poet- serve as the ways that she deals with the questions of mortality, the narratives of personal spaces and the people who are authorized to lay claim to them-

Sometimes we compare notes

I talk about the parrots

She talks about her children.

She tells me little K cries for effect.

If I get home after dark, I tell her,

They look at me with sad, reproachful eyes.

(Pahari Parrots, 102)

There is a pervasive sense of the unsaid in the poem. A sense of peace that comes from parrots loving people just as children are to love their parents. De Souza doesn't distinguish between the idea of the biological heir and the non-biological one. As one who has written of searing losses- death of her parents, the sense of separation or disconnect that comes from growing up different in a community that insists on conformity and mind-numbing uniformity, de Souza very well understands the ways strange beings and unlikely souls can bond. She mentions one of the parrots returning after, possibly, flying away to survive on her own. She writes of the battered beak and how she rushes to feed it "offerings" of guava and melon. Be it the return of the prodigal son or the roving pet, they are all the same in the world of Eunice de Souza.

There is a very distinct line that can be drawn between Fix and her subsequent works. In her introduction to A Necklace of Skulls, Melanie Silgardo talks of this progression,

In Women in Dutch Painting and Ways of belonging, she moves into a more introspective space, but no less challenging. She circles the self, offers advice peppered with the right amount of wit and spite…, writes love poems that bite…. 'Songs of Innocence'… where she casts her net wide from banal kindergarten Bible study to the deeply moving foraging for ancestral roots to establish a sense of belonging. …she could write about the minutiae of daily life and the vastness of the universe in the space of a few lines. (xvi)

The poems of Eunice de Souza ask us to reimagine the world very differently from the conventionalities that have come to characterize our ways of life. They ask us to re-read the complexities of relationships and exhort us to try changing the components that we consider essential to our identity. The usual familiar segmentals such as children, community, language, customs that we consider so essential towards defining who we are, are to her facets that can be reorganized, filled with new participants, come to include biologies that may not be human and still provide that sustaining life-force, Love. De Souza treats love quite unconventionally, bringing into it, a quiet dignity- a protagonist who refuses to yearn and pine, and instead seeks to be heard, to be recognised and addressed. Her love poems or rather, poems about love are conversational. The speaker deals with complicated questions of what can be said or must not be said in relationships, the censoring partner- who does not want their relationship to become a poem, the minimal need for words within a relationship that is complete and secure- these and similar themes give her poems the feel of a chronicle. They document the ways that lives unfold and progress from place to place and person to person. As she talks of the economy of words in a relationship, she points self-reflexively to the fact that her address to her love is anyway, "forty-eight words too many" (Its Time to Find a Place, 96)

De Souza is a poet who is shaped by the times that she grew up in- an age of transition for a nation that was trying to stand on its own feet. To be a poet of such a generation also obligates one to have a sense of history and a sensitivity towards the role that these shifting sands play in the language, vocabulary, expressions that the self uses to think and speak. De Souza responded to her time with economy, irony and a very critical eye that spared nothing. It was and still is what this nation needs- less rhetoric and more economy of speech and a lot of compassion towards bio-spheres that contain all manner of life.

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(All poems quoted here are from the collection A Necklace of Skulls.)

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