
A Diachronic Study of Selected Translations by Indian Women Translators

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Abstract

Translation is communication of ideas, thoughts, feelings, emotions from one language to another. It appears to be very simple, but translation is a much more complex activity. The translator must perfectly comprehend the source language and the target language and should be knowledgeable in the subject matter. Indian women writers are doing a fabulous job in world literature, but they are handling translations also perfectly. The present research article is a study of some of the Indian women writers who have given their contributions in the field of translation as well.

Keywords: *Indian, Women, Literature, Translation, English*

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Introduction

With a country as diverse as ours, it's no surprise that there are hundreds and hundreds of stories from every language, place and culture, but sadly, we hardly hear about them, as we did some digging and found that there are plenty of translations available. Here is a presentation of selected translations by Indian women translators from memoirs to fiction to poetry:

I, The Salt Doll: A Memoir by Vandana Mishra, translated by Jerry Pinto

This Marathi memoir (*Mee Mithachi Bahuli*) by actor Vandana Mishra, born Sushila Lotlikar in 1927, offers a fascinating glimpse of life as a Mumbaikar, as a woman, and as a theatre actor from an era in which having women on stage was only just beginning to be accepted. Mishra went on to be a very successful actor in Marathi, Gujarati and Marwadi theatre until her marriage in her early twenties to a fellow actor, and made a comeback 20 years later. *Salt Doll* is a book as memorable for its details of life in an older Mumbai as it is for the moments in which Mishra talks about her personal life, such as being asked not to wear high heels as the neighbours in her chawl might think her success as an actor had gone to her head.

The Gospel of Yudas by KR Meera, translated by Rajesh Rajamohan

This is a novella set in Kerala by Malayalam author KR Meera, recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award and the author of *Aarachar* (available in translation as *Hangwoman*), among other works. It tells the story of Prema, a young woman who falls in love with Yudas, a former Naxalite, who now pulls out corpses from the bottom of a lake near Prema's house. A part of Prema's love and attraction to the Naxalite ideology comes from wanting to escape the tyranny of her father, a policeman who tortured Naxalite rebels during the Emergency, including, she suspects, Yudas. *Yudas* is fascinating not only for its questioning of the politics of ideology, but also because of Prema, a woman unashamed of wanting Yudas, taking it upon herself to do everything she can to be with him.

Andal: The Autobiography of a Goddess, translated by Priya Sarukkai Chabria and Ravi Shankar

Andal was a young 9th century mystic poet in Tamil Nadu. A devotee of Vishnu and the only female Alvar saint, legend has it that she was around 16 when she "merged with her god", and a few centuries after her death, she was considered a goddess. Her poems spoke of female desire, situated in the body, and a need for spiritual and sexual union with her god. Chabria and Shankar, who present multiple translations of Andal's poetry, note that her songs are "self-portraits that suggest both revelation and veiling". They say, "When we receive Andal, we must keep her youthfulness in mind.

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She conflates extreme violence with swooning surrender; splices the desires of the sexual body with visions of cosmic temporality. Yet we refrain from applying the term ‘transgressive’ to Andal as it suggests a deliberate breaking of rules. It appears she did not bother with any social conventions or rules at all — except those of poetry.”

***Fence* by Ila Arab Mehta, translated by Rita Kothari**

Ila Arab Mehta’s novel (*Vaad* in Gujarati) was published in 2011, inspired by a piece she read by a Muslim woman who wrote to a Gujarati magazine about how difficult it was for her to find a house. Her protagonist is a young Muslim woman, Fateema Lokhandwala, living in a fictional village, possibly after the 2002 communal riots in Gujarat. Although her brother goes down the fundamentalist path, Fateema is set on breaking barriers: with a firm belief in education, she moves to a city in a search of a job and dreams of owning her own home. It’s a tale of narrow definitions of identity and a desire for independence.

***The Sharp Knife of Memory* by Kondapalli Koteswaramma, translated by Sowmya VB**

Koteswaramma was a worker for the Communist Party who went underground in the late 1940s, running from one safe house to the next. This memoir is the story of how she educated herself, raised her grandchildren, took up a job, and also established herself as a writer of poetry and prose. Originally published in Telugu, this memoir is also a story of the Independence and Naxalite movements in Andhra Pradesh (her husband, Kondapalli Seetharamaiah, who deserted her, was the founder of the Maoist movement in AP).

The works of the great Bengali writer Mahasweta Devi, whose work has been rendered in English by translators such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Lakshmi Holmström, whose translations from Tamil of works by women such as Bama’s *Karukku* and *Sangati* and Salma’s *The Hour Past Midnight* also have a rich body of literature to explore. A love story set in Allahabad in the 1940s, the Hindi bestseller *Gunahon ka Devta* was recently translated by Poonam Saxena into English and published as *Chander & Sudha*. It tells the story of Chander, a student who falls in love with the daughter of his university professor and mentor, Sudha, but cannot marry her as her father wants her to marry someone of his choice. What follows is a story of love and longing in a time where it was harder to keep in touch than any of us can understand today.

***The House of Kanooru* by Kuvempu**

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Set in rural Karnataka, this epic Kannada novel by Kuvempu takes us back to feudal times in the 1930s. A feudal landowner is becoming more demanding, while his spirited third wife wreaks havoc in the household, and his nephew brings in modern ideas influenced by the freedom movement to the fiercely traditional village.

Those Days by Sunil Gangopadhyay

Known in the original Bengali as Sei Samay, *Those Days* is set in the 19th century and spins a tale around the 1857 revolt, the Bengal Renaissance and two wealthy families whose lives are interwoven. Combining romance, history and nationalism, this is one novel that truly captures the period it was set in. This skilful translation by Aruna Chakravarti gives us the essence of the author's original text perfectly.

In a Forest, a Deer by Ambai

Translated from Tamil by Lakshmi Holmstrom, this collection of short stories by Ambai (the pen-name of C.S. Lakshmi) is as powerful as it is gentle. Ambai's stories typically are typically centred around women and have strong feminist undertones, and this collection is no different. From the wonder of childhood discoveries to the pain that comes with being an adult alone in a foreign place, a range of emotions and situations are covered in her short stories.

Translation is, in practical terms, an ongoing practice that never reaches completion or perfection, contrary to the popular saying "practice makes perfect". In fact, the more one practices translation, the more one realizes that translation is the inter- face with other disciplines, especially with sociology and identity theory.

Over the last years, it has increasingly been recognized and more and more forcefully argued within the discipline that translation is not a purely linguistic activity. As a consequence, knowledge and methods from other disciplines, notably psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, communication studies, anthropology, and cultural studies, have been integrated into translation studies, making it into an interdisciplinary par excellence. Nowadays there is an increasing input from Cultural Studies. When we take concepts from different disciplines we should clearly define them and clarify their disciplinary origin. It seems to be a general phenomenon that different academic disciplines use the same labels, however, with different meanings.

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