



# English against Englishing: The Case of an Early English Translation of an Oriya Novel

## Rendre en anglais versus rendre anglais : le cas d'une des premières traductions en anglais d'un roman oriya

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Article abstract

Successive translations of a text mirror the shifting translatory practices of a culture. Paradigms for/of translation can be tracked by following the trajectory of these translations. Usually, however, the “translative turn” is read off from the latest in the series of translations inspired by a text. It is the other way round with the translated Oriya novel, Fakir Mohan Senapati's *Chhamana Athaguntha* (1902), which is an exception to this developmentalist rule. An early English translation of the novel titled *The Stubble under the Cloven Hoof* (1967), produced by C.V.N. Das, shows a highly visible and active translator. In this Das uses English to counter the Englishing tendencies that are the inevitable end result of his attempt, as he says, at “rechristening” a vernacular tale. This essay demonstrates this and also explains the related phenomenon of the foregrounding of the task of the translator.

# English against Englishing: The Case of an Early English Translation of an Oriya Novel<sup>1</sup>

Himansu S. Mohapatra

*I am thinking India, once captured by the British, captured English, and opened up a parallel universe for its writers and translators to travel in.*

- Mini Krishnan

The Oriya novel in question here is *Chhamana Athaguntha*, literally translated as *Six Acres and Thirty-Two Decimals of Land*. Published in 1902, this novel authored by Fakir Mohan Senapati (1843-1918) has long been hailed as a defining novel of social realism, irony, humor and humaneness, and, above all, of Oriya identity, as expressed in the use of authentic spoken forms of the Oriya language. The novel has grown in critical esteem over the years through a steady stream of interpretation and translation (both into other Indian languages and English), having consolidated its position by the time of the international publication of its English translation (the fourth in the series) in 2005 as a “foundational text not only of Indian but of world literature” (Ananthmurthy, 2005).

The English translation of the novel finds itself in a peculiar double bind because the novel is a satire against what it sees as an “Englishing” of the fundamental institutions and values

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1 This essay is my tribute to Paul St-Pierre for having opened “a sweet prospect,” to quote Philip Sydney on poetry, into the subject of translation.

of Oriya society under British colonial rule. As the narrator puts it, “It was as if everything in the court today was Englished. But we are Oriyas, and so are our readers, and the printing presses here have only Oriya type. Thus, we have translated everything into Oriya” (p. 176).<sup>2</sup> As can only be inferred from this quote, the original English is translated into Oriya whereas in the English translation, the effects of this translation and the need for it are to a great extent lost. Thus there are anxieties about the flattening of its anti-English content, especially when in the context of this novel, translation means translating from English into Oriya. How then can English, which is the very medium of Englishing, counter it? It is interesting to learn, in this context, that the two English translations of Senapati’s novel published in 1967, including the one referred to in the title of this essay, and the one in 1969, felt obligated to omit the passage quoted above (see Mohapatra, 2009). Further, how is it possible to rescue the novel from a tendency towards “Englishing” that may be involved in a translation which is expected to be slanted towards the reader in the target language? There is thus the real and ever-present danger of the novel being subject to “Englishing” in the dual sense of both the loss of cultural originality and anglicization, which are the two meanings of the operative term, Englishing, used in this essay.

This then is the problem that the present essay seeks to explore, using as its central exhibit an early English translation of the novel. It tries to show that this translation titled *The Stubble Under the Cloven Hoof* (1967), undertaken by C.V.N. Das, performs the unique feat of brushing English against its own grain, thus holding in check a tendency towards “Englishing,” which its time and circumstances might have conspired to impose upon the translator. In a sense Das may be said to have kept a distance from the linguistic prescription for the contemporary Indian translator, working with English, and exotopically. As formulated by Anitha Devasia and Susie Tharu in a recent article on “Englishing *Indulekha*,” referring to the English translations of the celebrated nineteenth-century Malayali novel *Indulekha* (1889) by O. Chandu Menon, this prescription is to “re-mark

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2 Unless otherwise specified or indicated in the essay, all citations from the novel are from *Six Acres and a Third*.

Indian English or English with its history of resistance" (2005, p. 71). Das' translation certainly lacks the external manifestations of this re-marking, namely hybridized and chutnefied forms of English. It does, however, remain true to the spirit of this prescription by giving a massive Indian and, of course, Oriya, inflection to its English retelling. And this fulfills the second prescription for the translator, as suggested by Davasia and Tharu, which is to respect the alterity of the translated text by resisting universalist or "global" readings.

Like other cult novels enjoying a similar status, such as *Indulekha* and the Hindi *Godaan* (1920) by Premchand, Senapati's novel has been translated multiple times. Between 1967 and 2005, for instance, the following four English translations of *Chhamana Athaguntha* have been published: C.V.N. Das' *The Stubble Under the Cloven Hoof* (1967), B.M. and A.M. Senapati's *Six Acres and a Half* (1967), Nuri Misra's *A Plot of Land* (1969) and R.S. Mishra, J.K. Nayak, Satya P. Mohanty and Paul St-Pierre's *Six Acres and Third* (2005). Evidence has recently emerged of yet another translation of the novel that is not yet in print. This as yet unpublished version was translated in 1982 by Mrs. Sanjukta Mohapatra for a certain American audience at the University of Chicago at the suggestion of Prof. Richard Allan Shweder, a member of faculty in the University's Department of Comparative Human Development. Of the four translations, Das' has been called a "transcreation,"<sup>3</sup> while the work of B.M.

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3 Transcreation is a familiar term to Indian translators since the term was introduced by Purushottam Lal of Writers Workshop fame. Sujit Mukharjee glosses the term as follows: "*Rupantar* (meaning 'change of form' and *anuvad* ('speaking after' or 'following') are the commonly understood senses of translation in India, and neither term demands fidelity to the original. [...] Such cross-bearing has lately been called 'transcreation,' especially for rendering older Indian literary texts into modern English. The term has been persistently advocated for more than a decade in this country by Purushottam Lal, the poet-translator of Calcutta. [...] in the introductory note to his version of *Shakuntala* he [P. Lal] says, 'Faced by such a variety of material, the translator must edit, reconcile and transmute; his job in many ways becomes largely a matter of *transcreation*'" (1994, pp. 80-82, my italics). Apart from these three functions of editing, reconciling and transmuting, transcreation also involves interpretation, which Das' rendering makes apparent, as shown

and A.M. Senapati, the relations of the author, and a team of four translators are translations proper. *A Plot of Land* (1969) by Nuri Misra, on the other hand, is a shortened and retold version of the novel, which, according to the translator, has been “transliterated.” It may be pointed out here that transcreation and transliteration are versions of translation and should be seen as belonging to a continuum of translatory practices with transliteration and transcreation belonging to the literal and free ends of the continuum and with translation proper somewhere in the middle stage. In this essay, the focus will be on Das’ translation, because of the theoretical questions raised by the nature of its “Englishing” and to compensate for the long years of critical neglect to which it has been subject.

Mini Krishnan,<sup>4</sup> from whom the epigraph has been taken, talks about the emergence of a “third language” in the English translations of Indian language texts. She says that only in this “third language,” English in form and Indian in feel, can “the complexity of texts mirroring experiences uniquely Indian and filtering through classes and communities” (2008) be adequately conveyed in their translocation which translation necessarily brings about. She is surely right, but it is not true only of present-day translations, as her statement seems to imply. The “translative turn” is of recent origin in India and it is still more of a late developer in Orissa. While the latest work of translation of Senapati’s novel, done by the multiple authors, is a contemporary

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by a quick scan of its chapters when placed alongside the chapter titles of the other two translations of Senapati’s novel.

4 Mini Krishnan is the much respected editor of translation who was first associated with the publishing house Macmillan India and was responsible for sponsoring and publishing translations of almost a dozen novels from Indian languages into English. Two Oriya novels that figured in this list were *Danapani* (1955) by Gopinath Mohanty, translated by Bikram K. Das as *The Survivor* (1995) and *Sakalara Muhan* by Ganeswar Mishra, translated by Prafulla Kumar Mohanty and Jo Westbrook as *Face of the Morning* (1995). Mini Krishnan now works as editor of translation for the prestigious Oxford University Press. She has a wide knowledge of the translation scene in India and contributes columns on the subject from time to time to, among other places, *The Hindu Literary Review*.

work, the “translative turn” can be said to be brilliantly exemplified by Das’ work. After all, any translation of this late nineteenth-century Oriya novel should read like one that is respectful of its literary ethos, with its alterity not only preserved but also strong enough to permeate the language, in this case English, into which it is being translated. Das’ rendering gives ample evidence of this, as the following analysis will reveal. But before this, a brief account of the novel is in order.

### **A Signature Novel**

The plot concerns the attempt of a village zamindar, landlord Ramachandra Mangaraj, to grab a small plot of land belonging to a childless weaver couple named Bhagia and Saria. Mangaraj’s partners in crime are—only ostensibly—his maid-cum-mistress Champa and his barber Jaga, not to mention the village priest. For the novel, in the best vein of analytical realism (see Mohanty, 2005, 2006), shows the complex web of social forces which in its colonial form works to the disadvantage of people without the benefit of letters and other forms of power. Thus in itself very slight, the plot takes on a density of signification through a complex narrative layering whereby the story of land-grabbing becomes a metaphor for exploitative social relations and ultimately for the British takeover of Orissa, which took place in 1803. A sense of the novel’s wider thematic reach and resonance can be discerned from the abandoned title of the latest English translation, “Property and Theft: A Novel of Colonial India,”<sup>5</sup> as well as from the title of a recent essay by Paul L. Sawyer: “Oriya Village and the Battle of Plassey: Senapati’s Allegory of the Raj.” So the very act of writing the novel was informed by a process of “cultural self-determination,” to use a telling phrase (Mohanty, 2005, p. 26) which, among other things, took the form of an assertion of Oriya identity in the face of the presence of hegemonic languages at the time such as English and Bengali. Translating was central to this process of identity formation. Senapati’s narrator clearly conceives of translating

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5 This is how the title of the forthcoming translation in Paul St-Pierre’s *META* article (St-Pierre, 1997, p. 435) is listed. The novel was published under its new title eight years later.

into Oriya (“Oriya re tarzama”) as counter to the dominant ethos of “Englishing.” To return to the same passage cited earlier:

But today the Sahib was doing everything himself, because today’s main witness was an Englishman; he would also have to write out the judgment in English. It was as if everything in the court today was Englished. But we are Oriyas, and so are our readers, and the printing presses here have only Oriya type. Thus we have translated everything into Oriya. (Mishra *et al.*, 2005, p. 176)

Here translating, as Paul St-Pierre has aptly commented, is an empowering act in that it forges solidarities among the members of a beleaguered language community and also because it sets itself in opposition to the colonizing functions of the English language (2004, p. 266). The entire chapter of which this passage is a part is a fine demonstration of a minority language—taking minority as referring to power rather than to numbers—standing up to the forces of oppression by parodying and caricaturing them. These forces, comprising law, money and rationality, which English rule introduced into Orissa are, in turn, mediated to the reader through the novel’s plot. Its “economic telling,” to quote Ulka Anjaria (2006, p. 4796), creates an occasion for elaborate and flamboyant discursive musings on how these new forces are out to change the old hierarchies of the native society into the new ones of the colonial regime, as well as for a regenerative critique of both. Such then is the nature of the novel whose English translation is in focus for us here. Inevitably a key consideration in the English translation of this signature novel<sup>6</sup> will obviously have to do with how it can resist the seductions of Englishing, especially in a “westoxicated” world.<sup>7</sup>

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6 The present author reviewed the latest English translation under the title “A Signature Novel” (Mohapatra, 2006) to show how the novel deployed the marginalized language of the region as an identity marker.

7 The term, westoxication, originally used by the Iranian intellectual Jalal-e-Ahmad, is adapted by Dipankar Gupta in his book *Mistaken Modernity* (2000) to define the trajectory of globalization in India. See the chapter “The Westoxicated Elite” in Gupta, pp. 1-21.

Since Das' translation has left out the passage quoted above where Oriyaness is asserted by the narrator through the act of translation, it is tempting to treat this omission as evidence of surrender to Anglo-centrism or "Englishing." Das' use of ornate English may also seem to reinforce such an impression. The opening sentence of the translation may be cited as an example: "At once an estate-holder and a money-lender, Ramachandra Mangaraj has chosen to ply his business in the money-lending line by advancing the bulk of his loans in the shape of grain rather than of money" (p. 1). The style, in its stiffness and formality, is clearly Victorian, thus being at a significant remove from the colloquial style of the original.<sup>8</sup> That Das has throughout used this style is certainly provocation enough for wanting to discard the book. But to do this would be to seriously misread and misjudge an attempt that, by virtue of its desire to experiment with the original, to create extensions or extrapolations from it, becomes a paradigm for translation as writing in the English translation scene in Orissa. In Das' work the translation not only breaches the wall separating original and copy but also rewrites the original, deftly and flamboyantly combining the tasks of writing and interpretation. In the sections that follow the focus will be on these levers of rewriting and reconstruction. Considered from this point of view, Das' rendering demands and deserves a fresh look.

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8 Below are the versions of the opening from the four translations, three published and the last unpublished. All, in their own way, attempt a faithful rendering of the spoken form and rhythm of the original but somehow fall flat:

- a) "Ramachandra Mangaraj was a mofussil Zamindar. He carried on an extensive business in lending paddy and money." (B.M. and A.M. Senapati, p. 9)
- b) "Rama Chandra Managaraj was a village Zamindar. He was also a creditor who used to lend money and paddy as well." (Nuri Misra, p. 1)
- c) "Ramachandra Mangaraj was a zamindar—a rural landlord—and a prominent moneylender as well, though his transactions in grain far exceeded those in cash." (Mishra et al., p. 35)
- d) "Ramachandra Mangaraj is a village landlord [zamindar] as well as a rich merchant, who deals mainly with paddy." (Sanjukta Mohapatra, n.p.)



To do this it is necessary to think beyond the features of Englishing that are immediately apparent in the translation. For instance, Das wants to anglicize, to “rechristen” the Oriya novel by embellishing it with references from English literature. As he puts it in his authorial note to the reader at the start of the work, “What at any rate it illustrates is my full faith that English literature can enrich an Indian vernacular tale by teaching him who retells it in English the art of rechristening its thoughts and imagery and giving it an Indo-Anglian domicile in the Commonwealth of Letters” (p. iii). An orientation toward the target language and culture is suggested here, although it can be said to be only partially redeemed by the compromise formula of the hyphenated and mixed form of Indo-Anglian. It is, in short, a predisposition toward Englishing, a problem that is compounded by Das’ intention to remove the novel from its regional moorings (probably from a supposition about its parochial nature, a supposition that drives most translations from minority languages into English in India) so as to “give it domicile” at the national and international level. The recourse to English is inevitable for this contradictory Indian project. This is reinforced by Das’ academic training in English literature. Yet, as it turns out, Das’ use of English is meant to counter Englishing, which is his troubled inheritance.

### **Against the Grain**

This calls for a little bit of elaboration. For the question of why Das embarks upon a translation project at a time when the activity was very much suspect can only be posed by providing an account of it. Das received his education under the Madras Presidency during the pre-independence period in India and went on to profess English in the Government Colleges of Orissa after independence. So if anyone was immersed in Anglophilia, it was Das. The blurb on the translator’s inside dust jacket cover is telling in this regard: “His [Das’] stern south Indian educators, as he recalls, reckoned nobody wise who couldn’t write sinuous English prose that fitted the fair hands of lily-white memsahibs of those days” (Das, 1967). If anyone wanted fervently to emulate the fine English gentleman, his sexism and ethnocentrism included, it was again Das, as the above passage with its swooning reference

to memsahibs shows. Yet the work to which he had put his heart and soul, the work which clearly was his opus, was this translation of an Oriya novel into English, which, given the prejudice against translation, would at best be dubbed a half-work.

The book had been greeted with universal derision since the day of its birth. Personal recollections and testimonies of people who were privileged to have been Das' students reveal him to have been a reticent and taciturn person who talked about his work in his class and opened up before those of his students who cared to listen. Reports show him as being weary of other forms of public outlet, so few were the takers for translation during his day. But, of course, the book was, and still remains, the most public acknowledgment and announcement of Das' credo. And it is here that Das' Anglophilia is found to be challenged by his emerging nationalist sympathies. Das' dedication of the book to the ill-paid Indian teachers of English, in itself a singular gesture of reaching out and of community creation, and the extraordinary wording of this dedication, underlines his resolve to press the English language to the task of nation-building in what may be described as a first step toward de-Englishing. The dedication on the inside cover reads as follows: "Dedicated to all ill-paid Indian teachers of English who smile skeptically at Research in English studies in India, but believe passionately in harnessing the English language to deliver the national goods of which Research usually knows nothing" (Das, 1967). Cryptically encoded in this declaration is Das' good-humoured jibe at the state of English studies in India, its imitative, derivative and utterly academicist nature.

It is only in recent years, say, from the late 1980s, that the postcolonial diagnosis of the ills of India's literary education has been posed with ever-greater clarity. What becomes clear is that there is a mismatch, discordance between the text and the surrounding context. The hearty laughter of a character in Upamnayu Chatterjee's novel *English August* (1988) over the ludicrousness of teaching Jane Austen in Meerut registers the same recognition of our malaise as has been put forward by Indian postcolonial critics (see Sunder Rajan, 1992; Natarajan, 2000), namely "the pedagogic separation in Indian classrooms between

the English literary text and the Indian context” (Natarajan, 2000, p. 143). It was to Das’ credit to have anticipated this more than two decades before it sank into the Indian academic’s consciousness.

Not merely that. Das seems also to have envisioned an alternative course, one tethered to translation and hence to cross-cultural comparison and exchange, which is now gaining increasing acceptance in the teaching and learning scenario across the world.<sup>9</sup> And again it is translation, not as a mere copy of the original, but as an inspired rewriting of it, that seems to have appealed to Das, and at a time when translation had been written off as an activity that was decidedly inferior and subordinate. Thus Das’ work was a blueprint for an alternative pedagogy, an alternative way of “harnessing the English language to deliver the national goods.” It was an alternative, predicated on translation and writing, for which there was not much going in Orissa then.<sup>10</sup> The true Englishers were the overwhelming majority of

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9 Introducing an interview with Satya P. Mohanty in the annual newsletter *English at Cornell*, the interviewer, Paul L. Sawyer says this: “After decades of unexamined ethnocentrism, followed by a period of intense self-critique, students of literature are starting to think about what genuine comparative cross-cultural analysis looks like” (2008, p. 32). Unfortunately, however, translation, the enabling condition of cross-cultural comparatism, is not listed among the entities (Native American culture, the African diaspora, linguistic traditions of the Caribbean, or Anglophone literatures from Nigeria to Australia and India as well as non-English nations) that have catalyzed such developments, although it is implied.

10 To say this is actually inaccurate historically. Translation into the vernacular literature of the region during the medieval period was nothing if not this robust activity of rewriting and adaptation. As a matter of fact, the entire vernacular corpus in Oriya grew out of such inspired and, often, subversive rewritings of Brahminical scriptural texts originally composed in Sanskrit, known as the *deba bhasha*, the language of the Gods. The research undertaken by Debendra K. Dash and Dipti R. Pattanaik, individually and jointly, has illuminated this vernacular episteme of Orissa as it was formed through translation. Their published essays, listed in the references, are an invaluable source of material for understanding this alternative concept of translation. C.V.N. Das, by

Indian teachers of English, necessarily ill-paid, who carried on the type of derivative, academicist “research in English” for which Robert Scholes has coined the telling expression “hypocriticism” (Scholes, 1998, pp. 57 and 67), designating the widespread tendency inculcated by English departments in Anglophone countries to produce criticism of criticism of criticism under the mistaken belief that this is the goal of literary studies. Scholes contrasts the present state of affairs in English studies with its earlier avatar in the late nineteenth century, when under the rubric of “rhetoric” doing English was construed to be a creative enterprise with no division intended between production and consumption. As clones of professionalized English departments, English departments in non-Anglophone countries also invested heavily in “hypocriticism,” discouraging translation and creative writing. Thus in India what obtained was “hypocriticism,” which was twice removed from the real, in that it was engaged in by Indians writing criticism of criticism of criticism of English or Euro-American literature. And it is a trend, if truth be told, that continues to this day (see Mohapatra, 2003).

Das probably entertained a simplistic, patriotic view of the nation in the Nehruvian era in which he was living and writing, but his translatory practice clearly resists the city-centric, economist policies of that era, as enshrined in the first Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru’s slogan that the factories and dams are temples of modern India. And, of course, Das had the creative writer’s way and knack of dramatizing his fears and reservations about this new economic order through his defamiliarizing takes on the existing social institutions which, in a Dickensian fashion, he grasped as flesh and blood characters or vividly imagined objects. An example is the rewriting of Ravenshaw college, Orissa’s first and premier college, as S.M.R. College, where Das had taught for long years and where the writing of this translation had been carried out. Translated into Sri Ramachandra Mangaraj College, it is not just a caricature of the novel’s land-grabbing character but an extrapolation or

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grafting this concept on to the English translation scenario, acts as a bridge between the two traditions in Orissa and this gives his enterprise a unique value.

projection from it of a central principle, namely “Mangarajian Economics,” which the modern nation propagates.

Well! Mangarajian Economics, which is very much akin in spirit to the Rapture for a Capture felt by Miss Shoshimukhi Ray of Sri Ramachandra Mangaraj College towards her would-be I.A.S husband, is a respectable part of the General Economics of the Modern India. [...] Its teachings are an improvement upon the known principles of Economics, because it inculcates the theory that money is an end in itself. (Das, 1967, p. 211)

For Das, then, translating is much more than putting this Oriya novel into an English mould, which he disparagingly likens to the making of “an Oriya-to-English dictionary” (p. iii). It, he stresses, is “an imaginative English recast of an Indian classic, with windows of modern consciousness” (p. iii). The above quote is a wonderful example of such a “recast,” being absent in the original novel itself. Thus Das gets started on his second and more fundamental move toward de-Englishing.

It is these “windows” that help him to inflect English in the direction of the Indian, even Oriya, content of the tale. How exactly does he do it? Interestingly, it does not seem to take only the form of insertion of Indianisms into English or of the creation of a substratum of Indian syntax, in the manner of what the critic Neelam Srivastava has helpfully termed “mimetic translation” (2005, p. 46), characterized by code-mixing and code switching. Das’ translation, in its use of British English, is the opposite of this. Srivastava has termed this a “symbolic” use of the vernacular. It calls to mind an antecedent act of symbolic translation that one of the pioneers of the Indo-Anglian novel, Rev. Lal Behari Day, had performed when faced with a similar problem of rendering the speech of the unlettered Bengali peasants in *Bengal Peasant Life* (1874), an early and, in the eyes of scholars in the field, the second full fledged novel written in English by an Indian. This is also the novel that Senapati rewrote by vernacularizing it. Day’s remark is worth citing:

Gentle reader; allow me here to make one remark. You perceive that Badan and Alanga speak better English than most uneducated English peasants; they speak almost like educated

ladies and gentlemen, without any provincialism. But how could I have avoided this defect in my history. If I had translated their talk into the Somersetshire or the Yorkshire dialect, I should have turned them into English, and not Bengali, peasants. You will, therefore, please overlook this grave, though unavoidable, fault in this authentic narrative. (1876, pp. 46-47)

Following this logic it is possible to argue that underneath its Anglicized cloak Das' work is Indian through and through, meaning, thereby, that it is possible to look through its English veneer to its Indian, nay, Oriya substratum.

### **A Case for English with a Capital E**

A quick detour into postcolonial research as applied to language studies will be in order here in order to lay to rest the vexed question of whether postcolonial takes on the world are only to be presented in broken, hybridized English for this "substrate influence" (Wright and Hope, 2002, p. 337) to show through, and, never in the medium of standard English, believed by a large and influential body of postcolonial scholars to be tainted. The controversial claim of that influential book, *The Empire Writes Back*, was that postcoloniality inevitably went with a certain mutation of English that its authors called "english." Though universally lambasted by critics (Trivedi, 1996, p. 235), the idea has gained ground, supported partly by critics espousing similar views and partly by the experimentations with English being carried on by non-Anglophone writers. Not many are aware of what linguists and other influential postcolonial critics<sup>11</sup> have to say on the subject of English vs. "english." And linguists who also double as postcolonial scholars, are of the opinion that no language, irrespective of the history to which it is subject or it has spawned, is inherently partial to either the oppressors or the oppressed.

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11 In a seminal essay on Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Abdul JanMohammed has traced in the elementary simplicity of Achebe's English a decolonizing agenda of stripping the metropolitan language of its "sophisticated" baggage so as to inscribe it with "primitivism" Igbo style (see JanMohammed, 2002 [1984]).

In their essay in the influential book, *Relocating Postcolonialism* (2002), Laura Wright and Jonathan Hope have joined linguistic insights with postcolonial perspectives in order to demolish the myth that there is something about English that inherently makes it the carrier of imperialist values. They have demonstrated convincingly that the binary formula of English vs. “english” does not explain the textual dynamics of all species of postcolonial writing. In some texts, such as Anjana Appachana’s short story “When Anklets Twinkle,” as they show, Standard English is shown to be in need of dismantling in order to make Hinglish (mixture of Hindi and English) or Tamlish (mixture of Tamil and English) convey the authentic flavour of a region or a nation, which also crucially includes the whole array of attitudes ranging from derision toward (in case of Appachana’s portrayal of the chutnefied form) to celebration of (in the case of popular Bollywood lyrics composed by the likes of Prasoon Joshi) the hybridized forms. But in other texts, such as Kamala Markandeya’s novel *Possession* for instance, Standard English can be seen to be used to score a point against Standard English itself. Wright and Hope have argued that Standard English can be neither denied to the peripheries nor allowed only a centralizing function. Markandeya, they show, occupies the space of Standard English, but without that stopping her from marking off upper middle class English as a restricted sociolect (that is, a dialect spoken by a single class). They conclude, rightly, that “a binary characterization of language is unhelpful as it denies Standard English to the peripheries and implicitly ignores the variation at the centre” (p. 346).

The fact that Wright and Hope have taken Indian English literature as their testing ground has a resonance for the analysis proposed in this essay of the nature of English used in Das’ translation. The fact of it inhabiting the space of Standard English, and its upper reaches does not automatically confer on it an Anglo-centric character, as is often believed. Das’ translatory practice has the power to subvert it. This is achieved through the device of what the translator calls “windows” with two other things, namely the creation of a semantic, signifying surplus and the equalization of translation and writing, contributing immensely to this subversive potential.



## Indigenous Inflections: Windows, Surplus and Writing

First, we may consider, for instance, Das' presentation of Saantani, the villainous landlord's noble wife, by playing off her goodness against the sheer manipulative mindset of young men and women said to represent the supposedly new and postcolonial India. For this Das has lengthened the shelf life of one female character named Miss S(oshi) M(ukhi) Ray, mentioned in passing in an earlier chapter, and has called an entirely new male figure, Kumar Narottam Das, into being. This character is neither present in the original nor in any of the existing translated versions, barring, of course, Das'. And this person, this new breed, trained in the "Mangarajian" economic theory, as was noted earlier, acts as a measure against which to demonstrate the unattainable—but believable—goodness of a woman, Saantani, Mangaraj's wife, who treated people as human beings and whose language was silence.<sup>12</sup>

It is allusions such as these which offset the "Englishing" that Das has himself set in motion in another direction by setting out to write an anglicized novel complete with epigraphic citations of canonical English and European texts, much in the manner of Day's Indo-Anglian novel, referred to earlier. For instance, the epigraph to the opening chapter is a well-known verse from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* about the deceptiveness of evil. While it well illustrates the duplicity of the novel's hero-villain Ramachandra Mangaraj, it also hands it to the imperial dramatist by sourcing every original idea or perception to him. A careful examination reveals, however, that there is also a signal difference between the use of motto in this English translation

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12 While this is an overt reference to Rabi Shankar Mishra's interesting essay on the subject titled "*Chha Mana Atha Guntha*: The Language of Power and the Silences of a Woman," I am also intending to take issue with Paul L. Sawyer's critique of Senapati's idealized picture of Saantani. Sawyer says that the unattainable goodness of Saantani cannot be the source of an alternative politics within the parameters of the novel. Sawyer, however, ends the essay precisely by referring to the power of Saantani's silence, goodness and her entirely uncommodified mode of relating to her fellow humans, which, Sawyer stressed, can be the ground for alternative politics.



and its cultist predecessor *Bengal Peasant Life*, whose epigraphic habit it imitates, which is itself modeled on the practice of nineteenth-century English novels. The mottos in Das' text are carefully chosen illustrations rather than triggers to the writer's fancies. Senapati, as has been shown by critics (Mohapatra and Nayak, 1996; Mohanty, 2005), had himself rewritten the former novel by historicizing its timeless picture of the Indian village and by filtering it through an Oriya lens. This meant cutting the portrayal of village life very near to its bone by getting rid of Orientalist baggage. This is how he made the text "reference" contemporary reality in that complex sense that Mohanty has accorded to the "referential function" of literary texts, whereby truly realist writing shows through a deconstructive process how the link between object and meaning is a linguistic and social convention, not an ahistorical abstraction (2005, pp. 4 and 23).<sup>13</sup> There is a sense in which Das has taken off from Senapati, although his method has been to expand on the mediating layers intervening between the textual event and the reader. It is this "referential function" that ultimately outstrips the colonial habit of hero worship that insinuates itself into the translator's overtly Anglo-centric aesthetic agenda.

By way of justifying his excesses or surplus, this is what Das has to say: "A threadbare literal translation, however judiciously attempted, would have massacred Fakir Mohan and shackled his comic genius. That is, such a straight-laced rendering would not only have denied me the liberty of larding the vernacular tale agreeably, but also restrained the free play of his comic spirit by paralyzing it with a soulless English idiom" (p. iii). This does not so much make Das' a free translation as an interpretative one which "lards" the original in order to make those pregnant silences in the original speak. Das' "transcreational" take on Senapati can be best sampled from what he does to an apparently innocuous passage, that of the maid servant Marua's deposition during the police investigation:

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13 Also notable in this regard is this author's recently published article in the *Economic and Political Weekly* (Mohapatra, 2008), which explains the mechanism for epistemic access deployed in *Six Acres and a Third*.

My liberator, the Babaji, had been waiting for me under a wood-apple tree in the backyard of my father's house. We walked away through the darkness to taste the bliss of the soul. I heard him whisper, with his devotional lips in my ear on that dark night, that the path to Brindaban was indeed a dark and difficult path. On our way to holy Brindaban, my spiritual benefactor and I sojourned for a month or so in a splendid Irani hotel called *Fast Guys and Hot Sties* which stood in those days in Telenga Bazar in the city of Cuttack. Soon I came to be complimented generally as the Night Queen of the Hotel. During my sojourn there habitual litigation brought the Samant to Cuttack and he came to stay, as his wont was, at the very same hotel. [...] So I came with him from Cuttack after sadly bidding farewell to my devotional communions with Babaji Lolita Das and also to the ripping delights of *Fast Guys and Hot Sties* in Telenga Bazar. (Das, 1967, p. 248)

This may be placed, for instance, alongside the rendering of this passage in the translation done by the multiple authors for comparison as well as for the pleasurable game of computing translational gain and loss:

At that time, a holy man called Lalita Das lived in our village. I visited this holy man to listen to him narrating enchanting tales about Sri Chaitanya. My brothers became furious when they found out about these visits. I wanted to go away to Brindaban, so one night I escaped with the holy man; on the way, I stayed with him in Telenga Bazar in Cuttack. Around that time, Saant was in Cuttack in connection with a court case. He brought me here. (Mishra *et al.*, 2005, p. 161)

The above rendering is close to the understated quality of the original. Das' rendering, however, attempts a flamboyant parallel creation very much in line with the spirit of the original. The renderings are, of course, brilliant in their own ways. Senapati's is cryptic, indirect and making its point through innuendoes (about Telenga Bazar as the hot spot of Cuttack, for instance) and Das' is open, explicit and exuberant. The latter is evident from the reference to "ripping delights" of the hotel named "Fast Guys and Hot Sties" in the quote from Das that precedes the one immediately above. The flagrant filling out of empty or silent spaces by Das brings the transgressive nature of his text sharply into focus.

Such a design is also the product of a desire to treat translation and writing as equal. For the most part Das is rewriting Senapati, with a kind of gusto that is without parallel in the English translation scene in Orissa. His chief motivation is, as he says, never to write “an insipid page” (p. ii). As he goes on to spell this out, it soon becomes apparent that Senapati has only been a trigger to his own inventive mind: “Under an inspiration which he has made proliferative in me, I did not know how I could help throwing into his great portmanteau of hoaxes and humbugs some odds and ends taken out of the litter of our own dear fallacies and fads of today” (p. ii). And what is important, Das’ self-reflexivity also finds itself written into the tale itself, as in the following passage in the text: “Manika’s narrative may be a hotchpotch; but a hotchpotch which has vigour and health is infinitely more valuable than a ‘disciplined’ tale such as the dictionary-like ‘translations’ in English which appear in abundance in some of our weeklies to swell literary inanity” (p. 178). Translating, in other words, is a creative act and as such is akin to creative writing.

### **For Alterity**

It remains for me now to show how Das’ translation, though untrue to the letter of the original, is true to its very spirit. This is a matter of capturing the underlying moral vision of the novel and its pervasive comic mood. As far as the first is concerned, the translation’s respect for the literary ethos of the source text emerges from the fact that the chapter that is the locus of Senapati’s ethical and moral vision also emerges as the pivotal chapter (significantly titled “Heaven’s Ministry on Earth”) in Das’ rendering. It is also one of the most transcreated chapters. Its centrality is established in the original novel by the fact of its being the chapter of perpetuity or reversal: with his wife’s death in this chapter things go rapidly and relentlessly downhill for Mangaraj. He goes under just as in the Puranic story (to which the chapter alludes), the demon Jalandhara goes under once he is without the protective cover of his chaste wife, Brundabati, who is seduced by Lord Vishnu in the guise of Jalandahra. It is in this chapter that the novel makes clear (through the language of echoes, or what Barthes in *S/Z* (1974 [1970]) calls the “cultural

code”) its debt to the myth of “*Kartika Mahatmya*” with Saantani incarnated as the *Sati* Brundabati of the Puranic story.<sup>14</sup> All those innocuous details in the novel which related her (Saantani) to the *tulsi*, the emblem of Goddess Brundabati (at the opposite pole to the other presiding deity in the novel, Goddess Mangala, invoked and worshipped by Mangaraj in aid of his sinister design) who is enshrined in the sacred *tulsi choura* of every Hindu home,<sup>15</sup> now cluster together and reverberate in meaning as we are made aware of the heaven’s ministry on earth. Das’ version is the only one to have shown the greatest sensitivity to the moral vision of Senapati’s novel. And this is an important aspect of the anti-colonial, anti-English vision of this translation.

The second trait is, of course, equally readily traceable in Das’ text. Senapati has been a byword in Oriya literature for

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14 This myth has been narrated in an early seventeenth-century Oriya text titled *Kartika Mahatmya* by Mahadev Das. It recounts the Puranic story of how Lord Siva was ultimately able to kill the supremely powerful demon Jalandhara after Lord Vishnu assumed the form of the demon and slept with his chaste wife Brundabati. The devotion of his *Sati* wife Brudabati had all along created a ring of protection around the demon. Once she lost her chastity, albeit without her knowledge, the demon became powerless and was destroyed by Siva. Of course, the *Sati*’s curse, once she discovered the truth, turned the Lord into stone. The Oriya text extols the virtues of Brundabati, recounts the story of her canonization, her becoming a *sati*, and recommends the worship of the *sati* in every Hindu home. Since Brundabati tended her *tulsi* plant with care and devotion, the *tulsi* also became her symbol and became sacred by association.

In Senapati’s novel Mangaraj’s wife is shown in the same posture of supplication to the *sati* as she lovingly tends her *tulsi* plant and gives freely to the poor and the needy. Her life revolves around her *tulsi choura* and it is near her *tulsi choura* that she is found lying dead one morning. In an essay titled “Tradition-Modernity Dialectic in Fakir Mohan Senapati’s *Six Acres and a Third*” that is forthcoming Debendra K. Das and Dipti R. Pattanaik dilate on the way the mythical story of *Kartika Mahatmya* underlies and underwrites the realistic surface of the novel.

15 The *tulsi* plant surrounded by a small cement platform, often made in the likeness of a temple.

laughter, especially of the rip-roaring kind whose function is cutting irony and biting sarcasm. He has been adored in the main for his comic spirit. In his introduction to *Six Acres and Third* Mohanty dwells again and again on the comic and playful spirit of a narrator who has created this “sly and exhilarating text” (2005, p. 3). Das’ translation approaches the novel in the same spirit of playfulness. It is something that manifests itself, among other things, in the form of this translation’s naturalizing take on the punning and troping that is so recurrent in the novel. As the translator himself remarks, in producing this translation, he has put himself “into the pervasive mood of a wag or a ‘sly guy’” (p. i). The tête-à-tête between Mangaraj and the Muslim *zamindar*, Sheikh Dildar Mian in Chapter 8, is a case in point. Mangaraj obtains Mian’s estate by fraud. This act of swindle precedes the act of land-grabbing by Mangaraj. The encounter between the powerful Mian and yet-to-be-powerful Mangaraj, therefore, assumes considerable significance. As further proof of the importance of this scene we see the narrator in Das’ version treating it as a microcosm of the fraud that the East India Company perpetrated on Bengal: “Historians tell us that the selling or the buying of a donkey would take more time than Lord Clive actually took to wrench from the feckless Moghul Emperor at Delhi the Diwani right over the province of Bengal” (Das, p. 82). Where the latest version, made by the multiple authors, loses the playfulness of the original, as revealed in the play on names, by rendering the conversation between the two flat, Das’ version, true to its nature, creates a parallel comic structure in English, Mangaraj spoken of first as Mum-Go-Rob and then as Mum-Goo-Raj (p. 78), which effectively brings out the logic inherent in the original.<sup>16</sup>

16 The conversation between the two unfold this way:

The *zamindar* hastened to ask, “What is your name, my dear man?”

“Ramachandra Mangaraj.”

“Good! Ram Chunder Mum-Go-Rob!”

“No, not so, Huzur; it is Man-ga-raj.”

“Oh, I see! Quite so. Ram Chunder Mum-goo-Raj! I hear new names incorrectly sometimes.

Not always, though.” (Das, p. 78)

It is an index of the importance of this scene that the version by the Senapatis, and even the retold version by Nuri Misra as well as the unpublished version (by Sanjukta Mohapatra), all accustomed to stripping the text, to subtracting from it, feels obligated to add an extra element here. The Senapatis give the meaning of “Mamlabaj” as tout parenthetically, making it explicit that Mian “joked” (p. 31). Misra, for his part, gives its meaning as a “a tout or wicked man” (p. 37) in a note on the bottom of the page, and Sanjukta Mohapatra gives the meaning of the word as “troublemaker” (p. 17) parenthetically and also reinforces the Persian origin of the word by spelling it as “Mamlawaz”). Interestingly, all three feel the need to measure up to the text by adding to it. This creation of a linguistic surplus reaches a culminating point in Das’ translation, thereby helping it to transpose to a whole new key the comic and ironic vision of the original.

## **Conclusion**

The case presented in the essay for this early English translation of the founding Oriya novel does not draw on the neat schema according to which the latest rendering turns out to be the most telling. Such a schema is evident, for instance, in the trajectory of the English translation of another foundational Indian novel, namely *Indulekha*, to which allusion has been made at the start of this essay. This novel has been said to go through three phases of reconstruction: colonial (in the hands of Dumergue, the white Collector of Malabar, who first produced an English translation of the novel in 1890), the nationalist (in the hands of T.C. Shankarmenon, who wrote a foreword to a new edition of Dumergue’s translation in 1965) and finally the postcolonial (in the hands of Anitha Devasia). The essay by Susie Tharu and Anitha Devasia, cited in the introduction, identifies exactly this pattern. In the case of *Chhamana Athaguntha* there is nothing like

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Compare the version presented in *Six Acres and a Third*:

Mian then turned to the visitor and asked him his name.

“Ramachandra Mangaraj,” replied the visitor.

“Ramachandra Mamlabaj?” asked Mian.

“No, huzoor, it’s Mangaraj.”

“All right, Rama Chander Mangaraj.” (p. 74)

the first phase, the phenomenon of an erstwhile White colonial administrator wanting to translate the founding work of prose fiction in an Indian vernacular, as has happened with *Indulekha* or even the Telugu *Rajasekhar Charita* (1870), not being replicated in Orissa. The tendency amongst readers and critics has been to lump together the three translations of the Oriya novel that came in the first phase (1967-1969) as crude and inadequate attempts at giving expression to a nationalist or sub-nationalist longing. This then is supposed to cue us for the postcolonial take of the contemporary translation.

This essay has, of course, posited that there are elements in Das' translation that can be meaningfully blended with the postcolonial paradigm in an attempt both to stretch it and improve upon it. Those elements, I wish to reiterate, are the allusions and digressions in the text, the so called "windows": the creation of a semantic surplus and the bold breaching of the wall between translator and writer. Das can in fact be said to have approached his translating task much in the same spirit and manner as Senapati himself did his novelizing task. The essence of the latter is the reversal of the power equations between Oriya and English in that famous courtroom scene in the novel, the very epitome of Englishing, and the vernacularization of Day's Indo-Anglian novel. It is to Das' credit, in addition, to have carried out this de-Englishing while working within the limits and terms of English.

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**ABSTRACT: English against Englishing: The Case of an Early English Translation of an Oriya Novel** — Successive translations of a text mirror the shifting translatory practices of a culture. Paradigms for/of translation can be tracked by following the trajectory of these translations. Usually, however, the "translative turn" is read off from the latest in the series of translations inspired by a text. It is the other way round with the translated Oriya novel, Fakir Mohan Senapati's *Chhamana*

*Athaguntha* (1902), which is an exception to this developmentalist rule. An early English translation of the novel titled *The Stubble under the Cloven Hoof* (1967), produced by C.V.N. Das, shows a highly visible and active translator. In this Das uses English to counter the Englishing tendencies that are the inevitable end result of his attempt, as he says, at “rechristening” a vernacular tale. This essay demonstrates this and also explains the related phenomenon of the foregrounding of the task of the translator.

**RÉSUMÉ : *Rendre en anglais versus rendre anglais : le cas d’une des premières traductions en anglais d’un roman oriya*** — Les traductions successives d’un texte reflètent le développement des pratiques traduisantes d’une culture. Les paradigmes de la traduction peuvent être déduits de la trajectoire de ces traductions. Le plus souvent, c’est la traduction la plus récente d’un texte qui permet de constater le « tournant traductionnel ». Le roman oriya qui a suscité le plus grand nombre de traductions, *Chhamana athaguntha* de Fakir Mohan Senapati (1902), constitue une exception à cette règle. Dans ce cas, c’est dans une des premières traductions anglaises, celle de C.V.N. Das, publiée en 1967 sous le titre *The Stubble under the Cloven Hoof*, que le traducteur et son activité sont rendus visibles. Dans son approche de la traduction, Das se sert de la langue anglaise pour contrer la tendance inévitable à « angliciser », selon sa volonté de « rebaptiser », comme il le dit, ce récit vernaculaire. Cet article présente son approche et explique le phénomène associé de la mise en valeur de la tâche du traducteur.

**Keywords:** Oriya novel, Englishing, transcreation, semantic surplus, translation as writing

**Mots-clés :** roman oriya, angliciser, transcréation, surplus sémantique, traduction comme écriture

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