Untranslatability as Resistance: A Study of Mahashweta Devi's *Draupadi*

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Abstract

Mahashweta Devi in her *Bangla* short story "Draupadi," denies readers access to the tribal *Santhal* song that her protagonist sings. When Gayatri Spivak translates this text into English she follows Mahashweta Devi's footsteps in retaining the indigenous tribal lyrics in their original form. The idea of untranslatability enables us to question the paradigm of "world literature" and the cosmopolitanism upon which it is founded while rupturing the presumed coherence in the process of translation; thus, in turn, exposing the inability of western and postcolonial discourses to encapsulate the heterogeneity of indigenous cultures. This paper delves into the idea of the 'untranslatable' as an anomalous outcome of the process of translation posing a threat to the structure of translation. Like the threshold the 'untranslatable' defines a territory that exists neither within nor without; it views translation as exercise of power that seeks to homogenize the other and efface or erase the irreducible alterities of indigenous discourses. Untranslatability becomes the vantage point or chasm which problematizes translation and exposes the power relations along with the discursive, epistemological violence and violation that occurs in the process of translation. In refusing to be translated, we see a certain resistance to the violence of a mainstream language that is baked by political and social power. If translation is a mode of address, untranslatability becomes a refusal to be incorporated by the mode of address. Untranslatability as a process resists fetishization of indigenous discourses as "exotic", "alien" and accepts the heterogeneity and plurality of subversive elements latent within alternative ways of expression.

Introduction

> "Split identity, kaleidoscope of identities: can we be a saga for ourselves without being considered mad or fake?"
> "Saying nothing, nothing needs to be said, nothing can be said."
>
> —Julia Kristeva

If translation is the monument that houses world literature, untranslatability blooms like a flower between the cracks in the wall. While it exposes the flaws of the structure, it adds a touch of uniqueness to it. In the paradigm of "world literature" or to be accurate, "literatures of the world" that is sustained and fuelled by the process of translation, the question of the 'untranslatable' becomes relevant more than ever before. The untranslatable elements are the cues which maintain the heterogeneity and 'foreignness' of world literature. Untranslatability exposes the inability of Western discourses, even post-colonial discourses to encapsulate the plurality of indigenous and foreign cultures.

Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics Vol. 43, No. 3, Autumn 2020 [97-107]

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The 'foreign' and the 'untranslatable'

Before we discuss translation and the problems that emerge in the form of the 'untranslatable', it is necessary to understand the foreigner's position in a society. All translation is an attempt at knowing the 'Other', to understand that which is unlike us, to comprehend that which is incomprehensible. Who is a foreigner? What qualifies him to be different? These are the questions that must be addressed if we have to understand the necessity as well as the futility of the process of translation. Identity is always constructed through opposition as we describe ourselves in lieu with what is not us. Julia Kristeva in *Strangers to Ourselves* writes that the figure of the foreigner is crucial for the consciousness of one's differences, what we cannot identify with. The look and touch of the 'Other' is the primary instance of signification. The figure of the foreigner allows us to reflect upon our ability to "accept new modalities of otherness" (Kristeva 25). Thus it is only by demarcating the boundaries with the 'Other' that our self can be constructed, yet there is a duality that dominates us, the dilemma of being torn from and identifying with the 'Other'. Distinguishing the 'Other' is inevitably tied to identifying with the 'Other'. The translation of the self to the 'Other' and vice-versa, thus is crucial for the "constitution and survival of the self".

Cultural encounters or meetings are the spaces that provide platform to such discourses. Any 'encounter' or meeting requires interpretation or a mediation between the two cultures or individuals. It is pivotal to understand and interpret the 'Other' to create an interface that allows dialogue and makes communication possible. How do we understand or interpret the other? This is the nib from which untranslatability and incomprehensibility brew. We interpret the 'Other' in terms of meanings and signs that pre-exist in our culture and hence there can never be a complete understanding or a state of complete translation. The untranslatable is the foreign, there is no substitute for it in the target language or culture; it refuses to be appropriated or assimilated. To 'translate' is to appropriate the other. 'Appropriate' is derived from the Latin *ad propruis* meaning to make one's own. This attempt to make one's own what was initially foreign is what I focus on. How much of the foreignness of the foreign text should be retained while translating? What happens when a foreign text leaves its 'home' and enters the domain of world literature? What happens to the authenticity and uniqueness of a foreign text when it suffers the violence of mainstream languages?

Mahashweta Devi in her Bangla short story "Draupadi" that appeared in her collection *Agnigarbha* (translates as "Womb of Fire"), denies readers access to the Santhal song that her protagonist sings, or the various phrases in Santhal and hybrid dialects that the characters in her story converse in. Written in Bangla, the story "Draupadi", isn't meant for an eloquent reading. Devi wants her readers to be aware of the heterogeneity that stems from cultural encounters. She deliberately makes her readers aware of the problems faced in translation; both literal, i.e. the words failing to find a substitute in the other language and metaphorical, i.e. the cultural signs of one culture that cannot be comprehended by the members of another. Her narrative is successful in highlighting the urgency of addressing these untranslatable elements which are crucial to encapsulate the heterogeneity of endemic discourses. When Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak translates

this into English she retains the Santhal lyrics in their original form but fails to capture the dialect variants and various registers used by Devi. I aim to examine two texts, i.e. the original text of "Draupadi" written by Devi in Bangla and Spivak's translated text in English to study how translation, due to its very nature is inevitably tied to untranslatability. My paper shall view translation as an exercise of power that seeks to homogenize the 'other' and suppress the irreducible alterities of indigenous discourses. In refusing to be translated, we see a certain resistance to the violence of a mainstream language that is strengthened by political and social power. If translation is a mode of address initiated by the dominant discourses, untranslatability becomes a refusal to be incorporated by the mode of address, and hence in resisting appropriation, we see the defiance and reticence of the 'Other'. As a *modus operandi*, it resists fetishization of indigenous discourses as 'exotic', 'alien' and secures the heterogeneity and plurality of subversive elements latent within alternative ways of expression. The idea of untranslatability enables us to question the paradigm of "world literature" and the cosmopolitanism upon which it is founded, in rupturing the presumed coherence in the process of translation. The differences between languages and cultures are numerous and each word has a significant set of concepts attached to it within a language. While translating, it is obvious that there are certain words that do not "carry across" (translation is derived from the Latin *translatio* that means to carry across). There can never be absolute equivalence between two cultures and languages and as Lisa Foran quotes Ricoeur, "misunderstanding is a right and that translation is theoretically impossible" (Foran 82). Untranslatability can be seen as a ledge where diverging opinions can be seen in conflict with one another. To understand untranslatability we have to perceive translation as a process that has no finite end, but rather is interminable. The idea of untranslatability finds echo in Humboldt's Introduction to *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus where he finds the text "untranslatable", yet goes on to translate it. Barbara Cassin in her *Dictionary of Untranslatables* describes untranslatable as an "interminability" of translation, while Emily Apter in *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* describes untranslatable as that "what one keeps on (not) translating". Apter mentions this inherent disapproval of translation in Abdelfattah Kilito's injunctions of a phrase that he used for his lectures, "Thou shalt not translate me" (Apter 148). She claims a "right to untranslatability" amidst the ongoing translational ventures that assume cultural substitutability of texts and cultures. Derrida also talks of an eternal translation, as he likens it to deconstruction, a state in which "language, people and events always already find themselves in". For him, translation is always happening, never reaching finitude. There can never be a pure language, every language, akin to identity that we discussed earlier is nourished and enriched by other languages, by the process of borrowing from each other. Thus the incorporation of the foreign or the untranslatable in the cultural repository of signs and symbols is not an impossible proposition. For Derrida, the issue of translation does not border on the binaries of translatable/untranslatable as in case of translation studies, but rather an inevitable coupling. Every text for him is at the same time both translatable and untranslatable. Paul Ricoeur on the other hand feels that every translator must discard this dichotomy of translatable/untranslatable and focus instead on the faithfulness/betrayal aspect of the text. In the process of translation, a third space is created between the readers of the translated text and the author of the original, and it is the translator who plays the host to both parties. In being faithful to one, he/she must betray the other. The translator thus "engages in an act of linguistic hospitality", thus aiming to strike a balance between the familiar and the foreign.

The Naxalbari Movement, "Draupadi" and the "female militant"

"Terai[1] is wailing
My heart grieves with her
Flaming fields of Naxalbari are crying out
For her seven slain daughters."

The Naxalbari movement began as a dispute between the peasants and the local landlords over their share of crop harvests in 1967 in Prasadujote village in Naxalbari district of Darjeeling. It led to the police opening fire on an army of peasants of around two thousand in number. This followed the death of nine people, seven of whom were women. Devi uses this historical setup as a perfect backdrop for "Draupadi", and explores the aftermath of violence and counter-violence it created. The story revolves around a tribal called Dopdi Mejhen who is a comrade of the militant group that resisted the brutality of the Special Forces in the region. Dopdi Mejhen is thus representative of the resistance offered by the marginal indigenous groups against the dominance of state authority. "Draupadi" is a tale of refusal and defiance against the process of homogenization under the banner of the nation state and the rhetoric of development used by the state to disguise the violence it perpetrates. Named after the Aryan heroine of the epic *The Mahabharata*, Dopdi's existence abounds in duality. Draupadi aka Dopdi Mejhen is a tribal with an unlisted '*Aryan*' name, she belongs to a clan of the Munda tribe who have been coerced into the realm of Indian state but have always been marginalised and neglected. When she is eventually caught, she is gang raped and tortured by the army officials. But Mahashweta uses this very bit of what appears as oppression and domination as a mode of resistance and triumph for this tribal woman who is willing to give up her life in order to save her comrades. Devi inverts the *Hindu* myth of Draupadi's humiliation in the Kuru court by the Kauravas in the epic *The Mahabharata,* by denying any protection to Dopdi. She translates a myth that has always portrayed the female as a victim who can only be redeemed by a chivalrous male deity, to serve the contrary purpose. This can be studied under the light of the translator's agency. A translator can choose to emphasize or highlight a text from a specific point of view. David Damrosch in *How to Read World Literature?*, writes about the linguistic and social nature of the translator's choices and how these choices are based on the translator's "literary and cultural values and their sense of readers' expectations" (Damrosch 68). I shall return to this notion of the translator's choice later when I discuss Spivak's translation of "Draupadi". So Devi's tribal Dopdi has no Krishna or *Dharma* to protect her feminine chastity, neither does she need one. Her agency lies in claiming her raped, mutilated body as her weapon and refusing to cover it. The moment Senanayak, the army chief, thinks he has been able to destroy her and has exposed her vulnerability, it is he who is terrified at the sight of a naked, "unarmed target" marching towards him. The narrative technique employed by Devi has various instances of both literal and metaphorical untranslatable elements. The language spoken by Draupadi and Dulna is indigenous and is incomprehensible to the army officials employed in the region. The Santhal song that she sings is later discovered to be in Mundari language which is difficult even for the Santhals to understand. The song and the phrase Ma-Ho is used by Devi as tools to suggest a mockery of the process of translation itself. The inability to comprehend the messages results in Senanayaka summoning tribal specialists from Kolkata, who are unable to decipher the meaning. Finally it is Chamru, the water bearer who is called to help and who effortlessly declares it as a battle cry with a smirk on his face that is subtly indicative of Devi's own

apprehensions about the farce of translation. "Finally the omniscient Senanayaka summons Chamru, the water carrier of the camp. He giggles when he sees the two specialists" (Spivak 395). What is significant here is the focus that Devi wants us to shift from meaning towards rhythm? Even if the translator in Senanayaka is able to decipher the meaning of the songs and phrases, Devi wants to tell us that it is not the meaning but rather the rhythm that matters. Referring back to Humboldt's *Introduction* to Agamemnon we find him stating the need to prioritize syntax over semantics and focusing on the rhythms of the Greeks, which he discerns to be specific to their culture. Likewise, for the indigenous tribes, it is the rhythms that are more significant than the meanings. Despite his stringent efforts Senanayaka is unable to read their signs and codes. We witness an inherent desire in Senanayaka to understand, comprehend or contain that which he cannot decipher. We discern in him a hermeneutic desire to understand the 'other' better than they themselves do, or to become like the enemy in order to understand them. "In order to destroy the enemy, become one" (Spivak 394). In the figure of Senanayaka and Arjan Singh the two army chiefs for Operation Jharkhani, Devi portrays the figure of this orthodox translator who reads and listens only what he wants to. While Arjan Singh stereotypes the Santhals and panics at the sight of any coloured tribal, Senanayaka fetishizes the tribal as an object of his intellectual and political endeavours. He wishes to write a book on them to showcase his expertise on knowledge about the tribes. "He has also decided that in his written work he will demolish the gentlemen and highlight the message of the harvest workers" (Spivak 394). This is clearly indicative of his dilemma between 'theory' and 'practice' as Devi overtly mentions in the story. Senanayaka's plight is that of the translator who stands at the edge of his own language and seeks the foreignness of the other. His understanding of the foreignness of the tribal culture does not undo the alienness or reduce the disparities. His expression, "All will come clear, he says. I have almost deciphered Dopdi's song" seems futile and bleak (Spivak 395). He must be aware of his own entanglement with his native language and reconcile with the fact that he can never comprehend the incongruent tongue. Translators usually interpret the culture and language of the source so as to meet the demands of the readers of the target language. Senanayaka, has a close affinity to this category of translators. As he wants to study Dopdi as a field hand, he fears that her apprehension as his object of search as well as research will be destroyed. "Dopdi is a field hand. Veteran fighter. Search and destroy. Dopdi Mejhen is about to be apprehended. Will be destroyed. Regret" (Spivak 400). Devi also presents a scathing attack on historical discourses and the construction of a national identity that have so often excluded the histories of minorities and the tribes. Nationalism coerces the heterogeneous identities of individuals under the banner of the Preamble which homogenizes them as "We the People" . Homi Bhabha in his chapter "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation" in *The Location of Culture*, describes the emergence of a modern national narrative, arising out of the tension between the signification of people as "an a priori historical presence, a pedagogical object"; and "the people constructed in the performance of a narrative, its enunciatory 'present'" (Bhabha 147). While the pedagogical, built upon the historical sedimentation of facts and histories, tends to homogenize differences in forging a singular identity, the performative that is lived and performed becomes a source for the growth of multiplicity and plurality. In "Draupadi", we find Devi employing several registers and dialects to highlight the encounter between disparate cultures. Her narrative is polyphonic, thus giving insight into the point of views of several classes and cultures.

There is a dispersed pedagogical voice in the narrative that frames the tribes as insurgents and militants, the language of law, nation state and the rhetoric of development employed by the speakers of these voices. The narrative abounds in performative lived realities as well. The Santhal songs and phrases, the way they dance around the deceased corpse, their ululations arising out of the strength of their entire being, adds pluralistic flavours to the narrative. While the pedagogical is the abstract concept that establishes homogeneity, the performative is the concrete lived reality of the people which resists this presumed homogeneity in cultural encounters. Pedagogy is tied to the authority of the state, whereas the performative grants a special dispensation to the members of the cultures. It is in this realm of performativity that untranslatability germinates. In Devi's narration we see a blend of the two, a shift in levels of diction from conversational slangy Bangla to refined forms of Bangla as well as Santhali. While describing Arjan Singh's diabetes she tells that diabetes had twelve husbands one of them being anxiety, but the word that Devi uses for husband in Bangla is '*bhataar'* instead of '*bor*' or '*swami*' , which are terms used by the *bhadralok*. '*Bhataar*' is a slang which is normally used in a derogatory sense. While she asserts the individual performativity that ensures heterogeneity of discourses she also reminds the readers of a larger power at play that is absolute in nature. The heterogeneity of cultures and their discourses have to be curbed to create a stable picture of the homogeneous nation state. Devi is against this whole idea of homogenization and at one point in the story we find the narrator's voice saying, "not merely the Santhals but all the tribals of the Austro-Asiatic Munda tribes appear the same to the Special Forces" (Spivak 393). The Dossier's language and Senanayaka and Arjan Singh's dialogues all are charged with an overbearing sense of the *bhadralok*'s authority. They resemble the voice of the dominant intellectual who is entrusted with the job of ensuring the maintenance of this universality. On the other hand, to highlight the ever-growing desire to break free from this pedagogical narrative, she has meticulously crafted the hybrid languages spoken by Draupadi, the subordinate officials, and the incomprehensibility of Santhali and Mundari language. Comparing the two texts, i.e. the original text of Draupadi in Bangla and Spivak's translation in English, one would evidently notice elisions or the incapability of the target language to hold the variety and plurality of the vernacular. The differences between the source text and the target text can be categorised into, differences of elision or exclusion and differences of suppression. For instance the Bangla text opens with a description of Dopdi injured in the shoulder from a bullet wound, a detail that has been omitted in the English translation. This is denotative for her past encounters with the officials. It also pictures her as a vulnerable victim-rebel. Also there is an instance where the Devi mentions the Hindi song *Karwate badal hoga zamana*, a detail that Spivak's translation glosses over. After her rape, when she manages to recover her senses and is aware that she "has been made up", she says that then Senanayak would like her, which has been omitted from the translated version. Devi puns on the word 'like' here. It is the absolute power that he thinks he has exercised upon her and not her condition of multiple rapes that fascinated Senanayak. But instead of Senanayaka's stature being elevated to that of a powerful one, the contrary happens. Instead of liking her, Senanayak is terrified of her in the subsequent episode. His command to his men, "Make her. Do the needful", shows the misuse of power Senanayak indulges in to crush the indomitable spirit of a woman whose strength he is unaware and yet at the same time terrified of (Spivak 401). Senanayak anticipates this cruel act to be the final exhaustion of her spirit. But what is ironical is the unpredictable, untranslatable act of resistance portrayed by Dopdi which I shall discuss later in the paper.

Heteroglossia and Transclucence

Moving onto the differences of suppression in the two aforementioned texts, the English translation diminishes the irreducible heterogeneity of the various registers, dialects and hybrid languages used by Devi to a simple narrative polarizing into the conflict between Santhali and English. Referring back to the question of Damrosch's idea of the translator's choice. We can see that Spivak's translation is designed ideally to suit the debate of the centre versus the margin. Her translator's foreword fails to enlist these heterogeneous facets that are essential to Devi's craft. The readers are being prepared to read the text in line with the subaltern question. Devi's dialectical design suffers drastically as the target language is incapable of containing or expressing the subtle differences that indicate the class, caste, gender of the speakers. Also, in the English translation we fail to capture the power of languages as well as the languages of power. Elaborately speaking, there are several hierarchical languages at play: the national language superior to the regional which in turn can be found superior to the dialects and the registers. The significant use of Hindi words and phrases, the mention of Hindi songs and movies all these are indicate the growing popularity and cultural dominance of Hindi as a 'national' language, if we consider Jharkhani as a microcosm of the nation. Dopdi and her comrades speak in a Santhali intermixed with Bangla and Hindi, and the army officials who are in subordinate positions speak the colloquial dialects mostly spoken in villages. Even Chamru, the water bearer's encounter with the armed official results in a hybrid of Santhali and Bangla. Devi has used phrases such as "*lash nite koi nai aaya*" which is a hybrid sentence of Bangla and Hindi meaning, "no one came to claim the dead body". When she remembers Dulna she uses Hindi phrases to depict her strong determination not to reveal anything. "I swear by my life. By my life Dulna, by my life." which is in the source text as "*Jan Kasam, Jahan Kasam, Jankasam*". Senanayaka's usage of English and the words that Devi herself leaves untranslated in the Bangla text are often words that depict the power and domination that the state machinery asserts over the tribals who it considers to be its citizens. The state bureaucracy and army language employed here resembles that of the colonizer. The use of English words in legal notices and orders points to the administrative discourse of the colonizer continued in erstwhile colonised nations. The suppression of these aspects leads to a dichotomized representation of the tribal versus the state, the former resisting the latter and the latter inflicting violence and domination on the former and erases the linguistic multiplicity of vernacular discourses. Even the register used by Dopdi at the end, when she meets the Senanayaka after he has ordered his men to rape her, is that of a victim turned rebel. She is hardly submissive and the register indicates the disrespect and disgust she has for him. She addresses him as 'tui' which in Bangla is a pronoun used for some younger in age or someone who is unworthy of respect. Senanayaka is speechless at this incomprehensible act of a woman whom he thought to have defeated. These differences lead to the blurring of the dialectic between the power of language and the languages of power. The relationship between language and meaning is not politically neutral. It is reflected in the hierarchies of class, caste, gender, and marginal groups. In his book The Dialogic Imagination, Bakhtin talks of three categories of languages use; monoglossia, polyglossia and heteroglossia. Monoglossia refers to the single tongue that is representative of the national language, of which the language of the epic is an instance. Polyglossia is the existence of various tongues without one being in conflict with the other which is an abstract idea. In contrast to monoglossia and polyglossia, heteroglossia refers to the multiplicity of languages in conflict over privilege.

For Bakhtin, heteroglossia or the hierarchical existence of multiple languages or dialects is the lived reality. It is heteroglossia that is evident in Devi's meticulous craft. The national language tries to subordinate the regional which in turn dominates the dialects. The registers used by the characters are symbolic of their position in the power pyramid of state. The essential problem of translation is that language is considered to be a transparent medium that is a medium for the unproblematic transfer of meaning from source to target. What we overlook is the essentially intertwined nature of language, culture and meaning; that meaning does not exist outside of language but is rather constructed in the process of transfer of language across cultural difference. Language is not transparent, but rather a translucent medium that constructs the meanings it appears to express and this is linked to cultural signifiers of language. Taking into account these varieties that exist between not just different cultures but within one culture, opens up the possibility of several levels of untranslatability. They highlight the plurality of the idea of untranslatability or inexpressibility.

The Figure of the Female Militant

The most significant evidence of untranslatability in the story appears at the end when Dopdi willingly allows herself to be arrested so as to protect her comrades and is brutally tortured and raped by the officials. What appears as "apprehend" to the officials is in fact self-willingness. Dopdi is elevated to the status of a martyr from that of a rebel in this very episode. She could have easily disappeared into the jungle, which she knew so well and could have made the officials run all around the wilderness, but she would never enter the forest. She allows herself to be captured, and manages to send a message to the others to change their hideouts. She is portrayed as a tactful warrior who can predict the enemy's moves and act accordingly. Arjan Singh's words echo in her mind and she realizes that her absence would be sufficient to warn her comrades. She contemplates on how to send a message that would be invisible and incomprehensible to her enemies. After having issued the command to rape Dopdi, just at the moment when Senanayak is about to feel triumphant on having apprehended and 'made' Dopdi, and thinks she has reached the limit of her vulnerability, it is he who becomes vulnerable on seeing Dopdi walk naked in front of all the officials. Dopdi turns the table on him by performing an act so incomprehensible and unpredictable that everyone around her is terrified. What had been anticipated as a source of shame and disrespect becomes her pride and valour. She refuses to be objectified by Senanayaka and his men, and instead of being ashamed of her raped, mutilated body, she asserts her rightful subjectivity. In that untranslatable act of defiance, by refusing to cover herself, she is able to wrap around herself a language that is impenetrable to the Sahib sitting in front of her. As Helen Cixous calls out to those who "have been muffled throughout their history, they have lived in dreams, in muted bodies and silences and aphonic revolts", to become the "mistress of the signifier" (Cixous 13). Dopdi takes charge of her own signifiers, her agency lies in embracing the naked body of the feminine as a powerful weapon, which is otherwise objectified for sexual gratification. Dopdi was expected to be everything but fearless and defiant after the multiple rapes. Thus we see Devi's use of the conventional symbol of the 'naked feminine' to break the stereotypes about female nudity. The reason for Senanayak;'s dread on seeing Dopdi's raw nipples torn, pubic hair and thigh matted with blood, is because he does not want to view the female body as anything except an object for the gratification of sexual desires. Dopdi resembles the core of untranslatability

that denies absolute power to the process of translation. What Senanayak had perceived to be vulnerable and weak turned out to be the cause of his own dread. Senanayak is the translator who thinks he can fully understand the other. Senanayak had to accept the sense of provisionality, the impossibility of reaching a definitive version of the object he wanted to translate. Dopdi's resistance is akin to the perennial uncertainty of the untranslatable that stalls us and would continue to cast a shadow on the process of translation. Dopdi Mejhen even if apprehended, can never be comprehended. Senanayak's venture of "translating and transcribing" her will never be fulfilled.

Hierarchical Maze

There are certain drawbacks in claiming the struggle of the tribes in the Naxalite movement as purely an act of asserting their agency, and especially in claiming Dopdi to assert her female subjectivity. The valiant portrayal of Dopdi by Mahashweta Devi and her comradeship with her husband Dulna overshadow the gender discrimination and sexual violence perpetrated against women in militancy where the role of the female militant was often overshadowed by the arching male figures. Even if acknowledged, it was always seen as a wifely devotion or love for the male partner, thus parodying the whole idea of 'comradeship'. What Devi chooses not to bring to the fore in the narrative is the subjugated position of women within the movement that was hailed for being liberal and radical. The involvement of the middle class and elite *bhadralok* in the movement, those who claimed themselves to be revolutionary, also brings into question the actual agency of the tribals involved in the movement. The hierarchical order within the structure of the Naxalite movement itself, with mostly middle class mainstream *bhadraloks* being the stalwarts in the decision making process, questions the credibility of the movement. Were the tribals just being used as pawns by those who wanted to strengthen their anti-establishment stance?

Srila Roy in her article, "Revolutionary Marriage: On the Politics of Sexual Stories in Naxalbari", records her interviews with victims of sexual abuse and gender discrimination who have been silenced by the dominant forces of the groups. She talks of how these women achieve self-composure only by silencing and abjecting certain parts of their past. The abject as Kristeva notes is that part of the self that must be eliminated or suppressed but at the same time is essential for the construction of the self and keeps resurfacing time and again. Devi's account of Dopdi seems almost prophetic when read alongside the rape and murder of Thanjam Manorama in 2004. On 14th July, 2004, Thangjam Manorama's raped and mutilated body, pierced with bullets including her genitals was found. Semen stains on her dress confirmed by the forensic report suggested that she had been raped before her murder and possibly the gun shots in the genitals were to erase any evidence of rape. She was killed by the 17th Assam Rifles that is protected by the Armed Forces Special Power Act which in turn led to the outburst of resentment and rage throughout Mizoram. The Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958[2] states, " No prosecution, suit or other legal proceeding shall be instituted, except with the previous sanction of the Central Government, against any person in respect of anything done or purported to be done in exercise of the powers conferred by this Act", thus providing immunity to the officials posted under the Act. On 15th July, 2004 a group of women belonging to *Meira Paibi*, or the Torch Bearers marched to the Assam Rifles Headquarters, disrobing themselves naked and C Gyaneshori[3] was one of the women who took part in the protest. She told Human Rights Watch that:

> Manorama's killing broke our hearts. We had campaigned for the arrest memo to protect people from torture after arrest. Yet, it did not stop the soldiers from raping and killing her. They mutilated her body and shot her in the vagina. We mothers were weeping, 'Now our daughters can be raped. They can be subjected to such cruelty. Every girl is at risk.' We shed our clothes and stood before the army. We said, 'We mothers have come. Drink our blood. Eat our flesh. Maybe this way you can spare our daughters.' But nothing has been done to punish those soldiers. The women of Manipur were disrobed by AFSPA. We are still naked.[4]

The breach of human rights in the garb of state security is not a novel instance in the history of the North Eastern states. Savitribai and Kanhailal, members of the Kalashetra Manipur had been performing the story of Devi's Draupadi as a mode of resistance and protest to the brutality of the state forces. The only way to claim agency lies in the woman's accepting her feminine body: she has to break the shackles that have always made the female conscious and ashamed of her femininity. Whether it is Draupadi, or the mothers of Manipur marching naked towards their enemy, thus refusing to be considered defiled or dishonoured, we see the female asserting her rights through her body, that same naked feminine body that had been the subject of abjection and humiliation. Julia Kristeva in her book, *Powers of Horror* talks about the idea of abjection in relation to the figure of the naked feminine or the mother figure when she postulates her idea on the 'semiotic'. The semiotic for Kristeva is that stage when the mother and child are self-sufficient in a cocoon of their own. The child cannot distinguish itself from the mother and there is no spoken language between them. It is only when the child is required to step into the realm of the symbolic patriarchal language that must get rid of the mother. This premature separation of the mother from the child is according to Kristeva a state of abjection where the mother has to be gotten rid of but continues to resurface time and again in several forms such as dreams or nightmares. This is the essence of the semiotic: it is chaotic, unstructured, both capable of birth and destruction and contains immeasurable power that has the ability to dismantle the symbolic order.

From a structural point of view, untranslatability thus akin to the semiotic has the potential to disrupt the presumed coherence in the process of translation that thrives on equivalence of symbols across cultures. Translation is the order that cannot contain the elements of untranslatability and tries to erase the elements of plurality which form the essence of vernacular or indigenous discourses. Since the debate around world literature has commenced, it is time we look beyond the stereotypes of untranslatability as a mere obstacle in the process of translation and instead open up dialogue on the critique of the process of translation itself thus incorporating heterogeneity that breathes life into literatures of the world.

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Notes

[1] Terai is the local word used for the Naxalbari region in Darjeeling district of West Bengal.
[2] The Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958 http://nagapol.gov.in/PDF/The%20Armed%20Forces%20Special%20Powers%20Act%201958.pdf
[3] https://www.hrw.org/reports/2008/india0908/3.htm
[4] https://www.hrw.org/reports/2008/india0908/3.htm#_ftn81

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