



MONOGRAPH

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MONOGRAPH

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EDITOR'S NOTE

in a heartbeat I'll get used to the droning
of this new sermon the preacher's wife
sang him to sleep with, and the split second before
will decide the scars on the face of my new god,
she's had work done we heard,
after all, what's holier than whatever chokes
the world towards judgement day without any
farewell song on an out of tune piano no one
ever sat naked on, in a minute I see her,
reverent
plastic
perfect.

I like things that look like mistakes, so my
reflection sticks around for a compliment when
the days grow shorter, and the lists grow taller;
listlessness, has no business plaguing the morning
when the preacher runs out of breath
and god runs out of words to put in his mouth,
we're still here, and my reflection is in no mood
to take a hint, my palms are staying folded
until someone comes up with an excuse to
disarm my instincts,
I'm staying, I'm staying, I'm staying.

Ritobrita Mukherjee
Editor-in-Chief



PITA KE PATRA, PUTRI KE NAAM (LETTERS FROM A FATHER TO HIS DAUGHTER)

AASTHA SINGH

My grandfather is fluent in Sanskrit.

My mother did not think it necessary to tell me of this until yesterday, when I brought up the paper on translated Indian literature that I had been studying as part of my third semester course. We were folding laundry by the bed side, and I had a submission due the very next day.

“That would be called translation, would it not?” She smiled. I find it irritating to talk to my mother about memory: she does not speak unless prodded, and I cannot prod because it is not my memory, and I do not know where to start. I come from a family of language speakers who mix Bhojpuri intonation with Hindi inflection, the odd English word ever-so-often thrown in. Language does not fit itself into neat divisions in my household, nor does it elsewhere in my life. I did not study Sanskrit like my parents (or their parents) did in high school, I opted for French, and it left me with the memory of randomly itemized French words stuck to the back of my membrane that pop up ever so often, but prove to be useless. I remember having heard Sanskrit only during prayers, and it sounds like meaningless warble to my untrained ear.

From my corner of the bed, I interrogate her, and she answers all my questions with the same flourish with which she folds shirts into neat rectangles. My grandfather could read and write in Sanskrit. He had been taught the language in school longer, and carried it over to his life as an engineer, and the father of four girls.



Every day, after coming home from work, he would shower and sit by the bed on a *mudha* stool, a copy of the Mahabharata in hand. His eyes would rove endlessly over the Sanskrit verse, extracting from them meaning to translate them into English. His words were short, snappy, fast: almost as if he could not bring himself to take his eyes off the text for too long. I tried to imagine my mother as a girl my age: a nineteen-year-old engineer in the making, leaning on the bed post as she listened to him sing *shlokas* in ceaseless mutterings, and waited for the strings of musical stanza to make sense. Her childhood was made up of these tiny anthologies, of the stories of the Gods and the men and the Gods who wandered amongst men.



My grandfather is older now. He does not possess the nimbleness of the past, nor does he possess the copy of the Mahabharata from which he used to read from. He does not have a degree specializing in translation studies, or a degree in linguistics for the matter. I think of him when I attend academic conferences, where men and women tease out details and debate theories that he would not give a second thought to. He would not even consider his daily lectures ‘translation,’ much less something worth debating. He goes by feel, like the sightless making their way into the light: the halo of affect.

My grandfather’s translations are as airborne as they are a child of his Self, a piece of his identity that he barter-ed for the wide-eyed amazement of his audience, and the questions that come after. They become hazy visions when pressed in between academic jargon and theories of transcreation, losing the raw sparks that kick the machine of transcreation to life. His regular sessions on the epics, which my mother and her sisters listened to with bated breaths and smarting eyes were borne of connection and an intimacy fraught between the shaky lines of language. He simmered it all into a personal, homemade broth: one that my mother also made for me, albeit in Hindi. They might not be what research papers are written about, but they are witness to an enduring labour of love that changes face as it goes, but remains the same in essence.



DO YOU SPEAK MY LANGUAGE?

AYANA BHATTACHARYA

Last October, Bad Bunny hosted Saturday Night Live, a week after being named the headline act for the Super Bowl. In his opening monologue, he joked about replacing cast member Marcello Hernandez as producer Lorne Michaels' favourite Latino. In mock self-aggrandisement, a choppy compilation of Fox News hosts was edited to proclaim "Bad Bunny is my favourite musician, and he should be the next President!" And after delivering a series of punchlines in Spanish, he declared that if you hadn't understood him, you had four months to learn. Discourse online was incendiary; the mood of the moment split into two disparate camps. There were those who lambasted Bad Bunny, hurling affected "how could you's!" for desecrating the altar of All-Americanism, and those who championed his ascent, embarking on well-intentioned Duolingo courses in preparation. This February, his halftime show became the fourth most watched in the Super Bowl's history, drawing over 128 million viewers. It was also the first to be performed almost entirely in a language other than English, barring a salsa-infused Lady Gaga cameo. There were concerns asserting that Bad Bunny's show would be incomprehensible, requiring millions of American viewers to live-consult Google Translate, or worse, miss out on a rare, unifying moment in pop-culture. But his show, evincing cultural pride and family, did just the opposite, leaving audiences with the ever-appropriate message of love conquering hate.

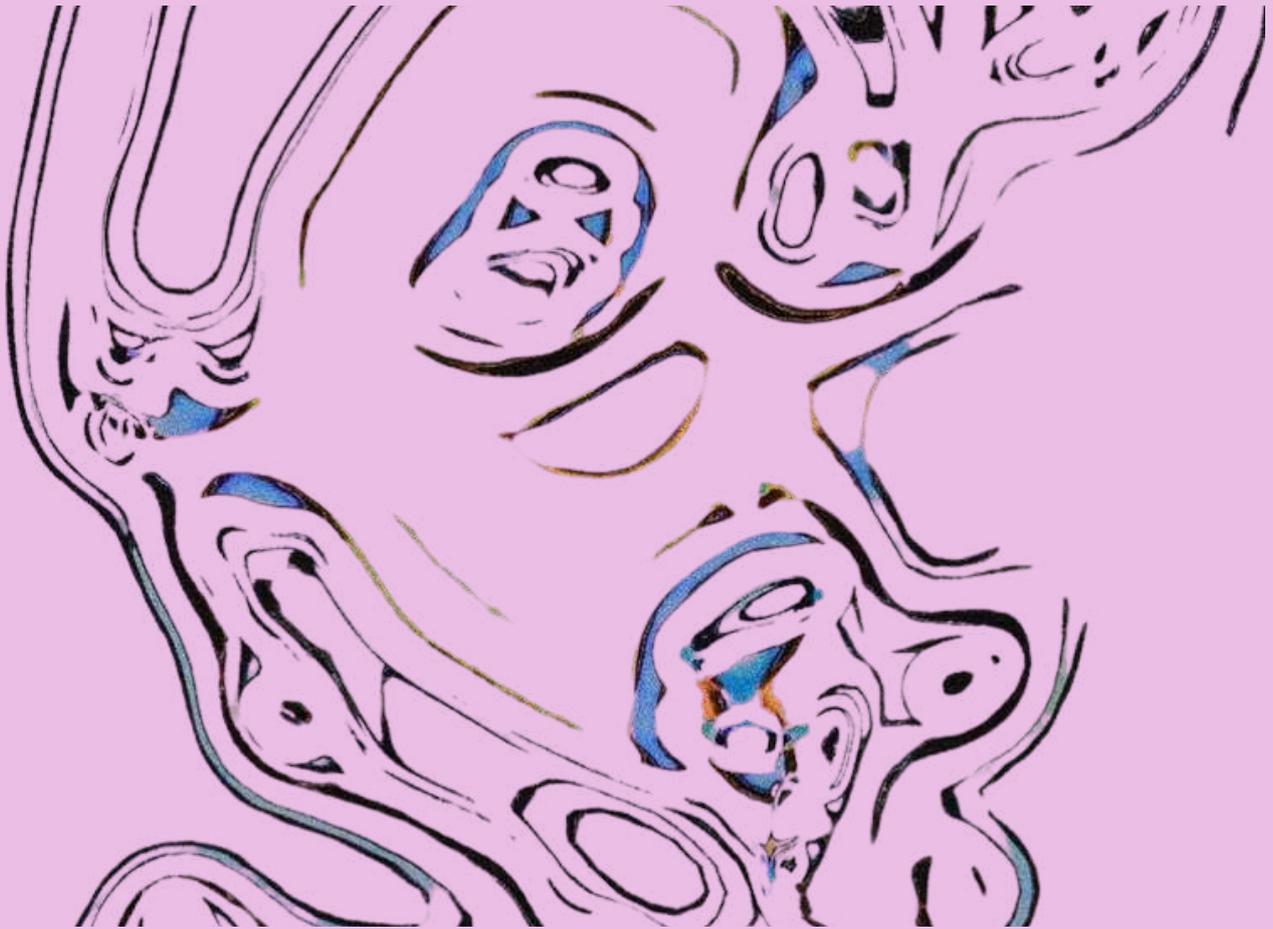
I linger here because Bad Bunny violated (or perhaps, unwittingly cleared) an unwritten rule of cultural translation by choosing not to accommodate. The outrage preceding and following his show reviled his anti-ICE advocacy, his perceived proclivity for skirts, but most conceivably, the un-Americanness of a Spanish Super Bowl halftime show. To his critics, it was simple math: in a population of 348 million, only 59 million people spoke Spanish. That Bad Bunny performed his catalogue without so much as including English subtitles (as demanded by many), was audacious. American media has long treated translation as a one-way street. His refusal to default to English courted a sort of citizen-of-the-world fantasy — if the Super Bowl is a national spectacle, the halftime show is principally international. In choosing to retain language and cultural references, Bad Bunny's show could've been incoherent and puzzling. But by virtue of his medium, Bad Bunny lucked out; music famously eclipses language when sparking connection. And yet, most creators aren't that fortunate. So, the question here is this: how *do* you adapt media for an audience that doesn't speak the language?



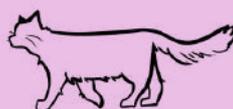


Succession (2018–2023) is an incisive, prestige TV dramedy for the post-hyphen age. It's post-modern, post-irony, post-truth, even. It indulges in profanity and revels in its lack of a moral compass. It's acute and terribly satirical. And it's funny because you're in on the joke, because the ideal viewer is acclimatised to cultural shorthand and American political absurdity. Even if you were to translate the dialogue word-for-word, the show's intended tone of precise ridicule just wouldn't land. In a standout moment wrought with second-hand embarrassment, Kendall performs a tribute to his father, Logan. "L to the 'OG'", he raps, off-beat, invoking bewildered stares and laughter. The original lyricism articulates a certain faux-hardcore hip-hop persona, lost and discarded in the Hindi dub of Succession. Translated, the scene no longer denotes Kendall's desperate plea for power, nor the humiliation rituals he undergoes in asking for it. When Connor runs for office, a funeral serves as a fundraiser. He tells his girlfriend he has a "donor boner". Juvenile, and yet, exactly the kind of irreverent throwaway line the show specialises in. The Hindi dub entirely abandons this joke ("boner" isn't as funny when translated to Hindi). But without the joke, the audience loses key context for Connor's character. Connor, despite his best efforts at self-actualisation, is a grade-A asshole, just like his siblings. Cutting the joke cuts him slack. If the original, English show has a knife to its characters' throats, the Hindi dub blunts its edge.

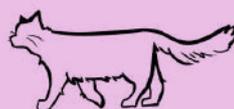




So, if a show is technically the same, but doesn't preserve its essence in its translation, is it still the same show? A ship of Theseus-esque dilemma, answered by a different show: Shin-chan. There's an insouciance to five-year old Shin-chan that's left him the lasting emblem of childhood mischief in India, a blazing personality reproached and chastised by parents worried sick. This panging worry led to a brief ban in 2008, which would strip the show of its provocative and vulgar material in favour of a wholesome, family-friendly turnaround. The version I grew up with was so heavily censored that episodes often bordered on illogic. Shin-chan's explicit "elephant dance" was blurred, and his dad now drank juice, not beer. Years later, I'd discover the Funimation dub, a stark departure from the Shin-chan I'd grown used to. It was a whole new show. This Shin-chan delighted itself in its political incorrectness, having perfected a kind of slobbish prurience. In one episode, a (five-year old) character plays-pretend that she's been sold into "white slavery", blaming her scheming stepmother. She begs her father to leave his inheritance to her instead, claiming her stepmother would use it for a "vaginoplasty". There's certainly a world of difference between the version I grew up with and what Funimation broadcast. And crucially, neither of them accurately reflect the original Japanese anime. In the case of Shin-chan, and really, any work that loses tonal consistency across its editions, each variant is a new ship. Each variant remedies the anxieties and appetites of its audience. With it, the original becomes secondary to the audience.



I'm not a purist. I don't think Shin-chan's moral restructuring in the Funimation dub mars the original show. But there's a certain give-and-take to what translated work asks of its audience and creators. Almost compulsorily, translation is perceived as an act of accommodation, extending accessibility — hospitable, welcoming servitude. And yet, in practice, it presents itself as a sort of power struggle. Adapting dialogue to culture is resolutely difficult. Character notes are scrapped, plotlines eschewed, tone lost to the ever-fleeting preferences of the zeitgeist. Translation, really, becomes an exercise in bargaining. How much story are you willing to forfeit for relatability's sake? And how much editing and modification does it take before something's an entirely new work? When Shin-chan was adapted for American audiences, it pulled from the likes of South Park and Family Guy to situate itself in a post-9/11 political climate. Oggy and the Cockroaches, an originally silent cartoon, was adapted for Indian audiences with a Hindi dub in 2009. This dubbed version even renamed the cockroaches, assigning each a Bollywood actor's accent to emulate. I'm willing to bet that in adapting media for new audiences, a lot more invention is involved than intended. That's why Bad Bunny's halftime show warranted such spotlight — his refusal to accommodate preserved the integrity of his work. Instead of zeroing in on an American experience, he invited the audience to zoom out.



UNTITLED

NASTA MARTYN



UNTITLED

NASTA MARTYN



A NOTE TO MY HOMELAND

SHAFIYA SHOWKAT

Dear Kashmir,

I never loved you with the intention of staying with you forever. Your beauty frightened me, to the point where I became afraid of beautiful things. Perhaps because I belonged to a part of Kashmir which no one romanticises on the internet: rural Kashmir. The side of Kashmir cut off from glossy, curated images, where people are not obsessed with the virtual world, where a few aunties gather under the only passenger shed and judge everyone and everything. It wasn't their fault, though. They had nowhere else to go; they found their freedom in gossiping, the only place where they could share their opinions and actually feel valued. They weren't the only reason I hated you.

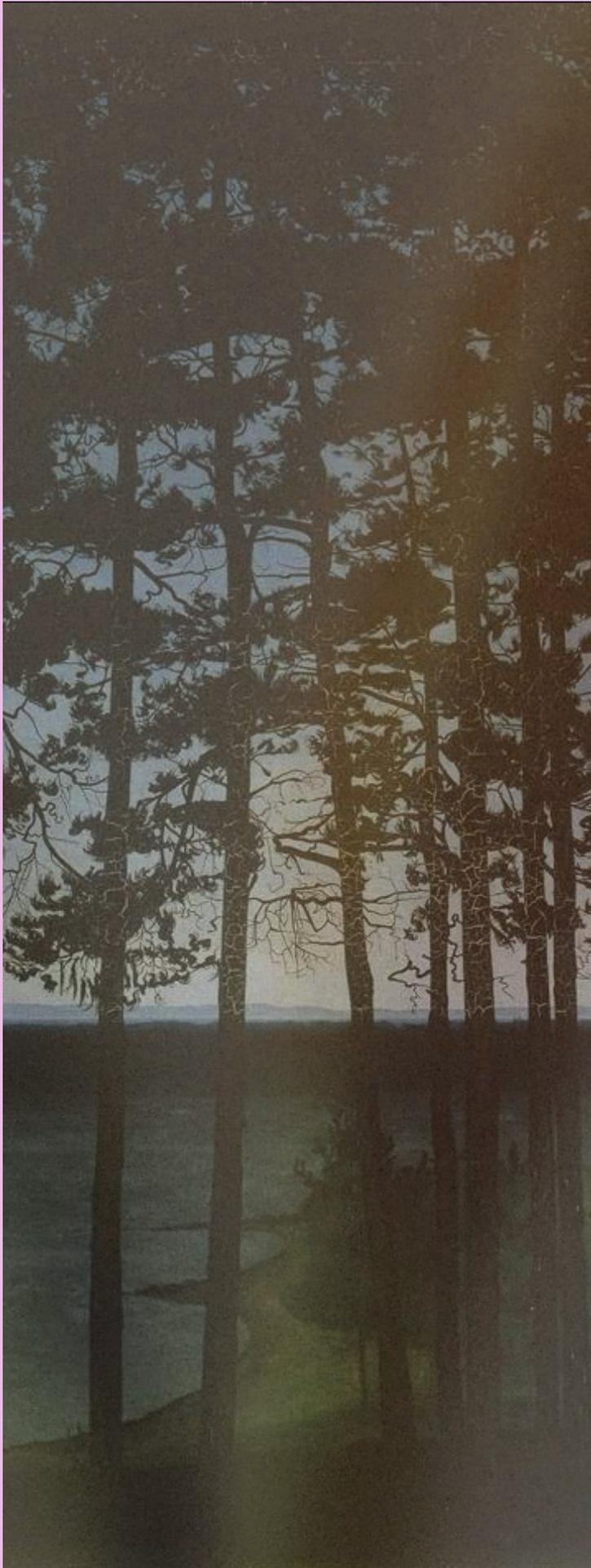
I also hated the school I studied in for twelve years, where I entered as a child and left as a teenager. A school that never accepted my rebellious ideas, where boys could never understand how girls could be opinionated, because they believed women should not have opinions at all. They fiercely defended their villages, and since I was the only one from mine, I was constantly expected to defend it. I did, with as much honesty as I had been taught. But it struck them as odd, because girls, they believed, do not belong deeply enough to a place to defend it. Because in Kashmir, girls don't own villages.

That school of yours never understood my inability to solve equations. Two into two was always twenty-two for me, while they insisted it was four. Once, a teacher wrote an equation on the blackboard and asked me to solve it. He knew I could not. But he had a point to prove, that I would never get into the school I had applied to, because the entrance test depended on reasoning ability. And by reasoning, they meant mathematics, not my ability to understand emotions, or to differentiate between right and wrong.

I was an average student, which is ironic, because I was always the one speaking in assemblies, participating in debates, writing and reading. Yet, that wasn't the only reason I hated you.



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When I passed that school with a good percentage and moved on to higher secondary education, I chose arts. This confused many teachers (they did not yet know I was an average student). They conducted a joint interview on the lawn and asked me questions I could not answer, partly because I was scared, and mostly because I did not know. Once they were convinced of how foolish I was, they allowed me to take arts. It felt less like a choice and more like charity.

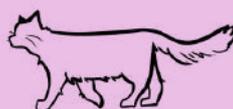
But even that wasn't the only reason.

After passing twelfth grade, I decided to go to Srinagar for further studies. Once again, there was an entrance test. Again, two into two equalled twenty-two, and I failed. I begged my parents to let me drop out, but they refused. I was forced to attend a local college, a place I had always despised.

You chose things for me that I never wanted for myself. I did not want to be confined to that little village where all I could see were huge trees that restricted even ideas from flowing.

And then, something changed.

They say everything happens for a reason, and I never believed that until I entered college. It was as if you had intentionally played your little tricks, making me go through all that trouble so I could finally reach there. You wanted me to be average so I would understand what it means to not belong, what it means to not fit in. You wanted me to learn the art of silence, so that I would eventually resort to the only other way of expressing myself, writing.



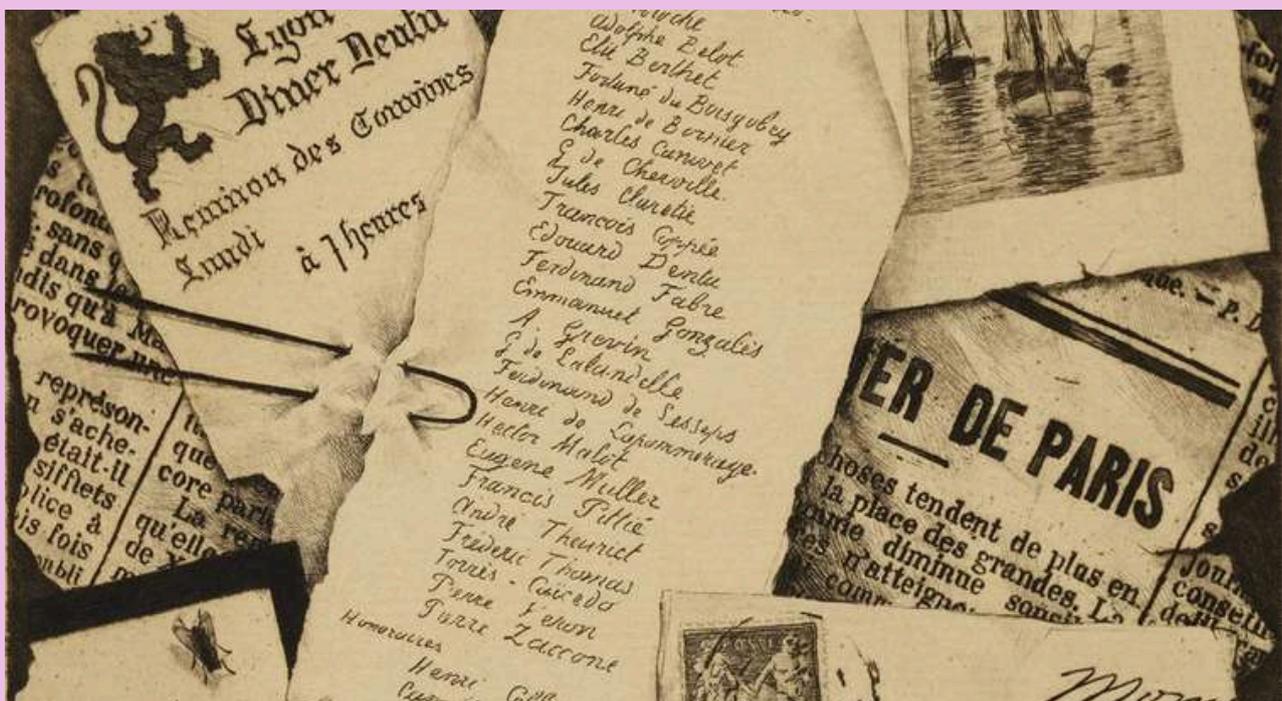
MONOGRAPH

I started scribbling, gathering all the nuances of my life onto paper, and somehow, it began to make sense.

I have never had the confidence to love what I do, or to be proud of myself for my little achievements. Perhaps that is why, even when I filled my room with certificates and awards, I never felt satisfied. But in that college, the process of finding myself finally began. I met my Guardian Angel, the only gift I would ever be endlessly thankful for. For the first time in my life, I felt I belonged somewhere that wasn't my home. I felt loved. I felt heard.

By the time I entered college, I had published a few articles in newspapers and had somehow gained an artistic vision and a trembling confidence. I shared one of my articles in the college group, never imagining it would change my life. My Guardian Angel read it and saw a writer in me. He saw a poet when I did not even know what poetry meant. He asked me to write short stories when I had never read one. He encouraged me to read novels and introduced me to the vast world of literature. With writing, I found my voice. And with my voice, my life began to change.

The world outside was cruel, judgmental, and harsh towards average students. But inside that small college, I entered a new universe, where everything felt possible. For the longest time, I believed teachers existed to humiliate you: to make you solve equations in front of everyone, to shame you for not memorising a few lines. But the teachers there showed me what teaching truly meant. I could borrow ten books when I was allowed only one. They trusted me before I trusted myself.



My Guardian Angel urged me to apply for a Master's degree outside Kashmir. Until then, I had never imagined leaving you, not because I didn't want to, but because I didn't know where I would go. I was like my mother then, innocent about the world, believing Muslims and Kashmiris were synonyms, thinking religion existed only within our valley.

For the first time, I cleared an entrance test, because this time, nobody asked me what two into two was. Instead, they asked what I had read, what I had understood, what I felt. And I loved it.

I believed Delhi air would erase you from my system. Instead, it forced me to confront my identity.

I never knew I had a "Kashmiri accent," that I spoke slowly, softly. For a long time, I struggled to understand my classmates because they spoke too fast. I began to miss slow conversations. Running through metro stations, pushing through crowds, I longed for the stillness I had left behind.

I began to brag about you.

When sweat streamed down my shoulders, I missed the sudden, quiet rainfalls of Kashmir. I had once found faults in my school, but now I realised, no other school here had a pond of its own. We had no water coolers, no running supply. We drank from the pond, always ice-cold. We had no electricity, because it never grew unbearably hot. And when it turned cold, we simply sat under the sun and studied.

I always wondered how overrated you were because I had seen your ugliness. But once I started living outside, I understood why people always run back to their homes at the end of the day.

I fell in love with you only after I left you. Perhaps that distance was necessary.

In school, a girl once told me, *You don't even look like you belong here. You seem foreign.* She meant my ideas were different, that I dreamed of liberation, of a better life. I always felt I belonged to the world, not just to that small village where people knew what you had for dinner before they had their own.

But in Delhi, people said I didn't look like I was from Kashmir, only my accent gave me away. And I realised that wasn't a compliment either. Here, Kashmiris were expected to be prettier, fairer. I was neither.



But in Kashmir, I could speak in Kashmiri. I did not have to translate my thoughts from Kashmiri to Urdu, and from Urdu to English. I could laugh freely with my friends over silly jokes and never feel out of place.

Leaving you was necessary. No doubt, I fell in love with you, but I also despised you even more. For once I left, I realised just how restricted my life had been, how much I could do here that you would never allow me to. I could watch a movie and no one would complain to my father or label me characterless. I could stroll through parks without loudspeaker announcements ordering girls to leave. I could walk through museums and appreciate art. I could wear hairpins, and no one would laugh.

But now, I have begun to accept that it was never your fault.



I blame the mountains.

The mountains surrounded you and never allowed your thoughts to wander. We were always enclosed by them, and so our thinking remained confined. We could only see as far as the mountains allowed us to. The aunties under the passenger shed had nothing else to speak about, so they spoke about whoever passed by. The boys in my class did not understand me because they had never seen girls speak.

So perhaps it all comes down to how much one is allowed to see and dream.

Delhi isn't a charm either, it is always too hot, too crowded, too polluted. But at least, here, I can be myself. And in the crowd, no one notices.

I think, after all, we only want to live quietly, without being watched.

Even in Delhi, I cannot see too far, it is covered in smog most of the time. But at least, thoughts can pierce through the air. They cannot pierce mountains.

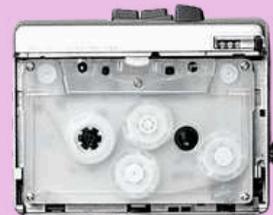
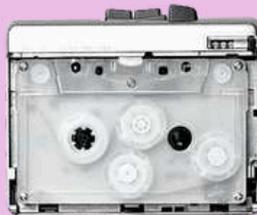


MOURNING THE WALKMAN

MONJITA SARKAR

What do you call someone living with the solemn conviction that everything around them is fundamentally unreal: a conspiracy theorist or “mentally ill”?

The sense of the ‘unreal’ is less a claim about the world than an experience of how it is received. The Walkman was a portable cassette player by Sony; its awkward etymology encapsulates its minimal function: listening to music while being able to move around. The quintessential early 2000s coming-of-age film often featured the main character skateboarding downhill, the walkman pumping euphoric music into the cavity of their skulls. Far less picturesque, but the Sony Walkman D-E220 formed my childhood in the deliberate fashion of the things you possess, possessing you. A button to open it up like a clamshell—place a CD around the circular spindle— plug in your earphones. This corporeality of music would sustain me through lifelong tinnitus. With the walkman, I could tune out of a world I had no desire to grow up in. It had its occasional weaknesses: of batteries fizzling out fast, extreme fragility where the ever so slight movement could cause the music to stutter or jump. Yet, to explain the specialness of such a contraption when the cellphone has virtually taken over all the functions of any such individual technology in our lives, is a daunting task.



The Walkman Effect is a paper by the Japanese musicologist, Shuhei Hosokawa, who uses the term to describe the phenomenon of individuals making for themselves a private bubble of audio within public space. An interviewer reporting for *Nouvel Observateur* asked around young people (18-21 years old) in 1981: whether men with the walkman were human or not: whether they were losing contact with reality; whether they were psychotic or schizophrenic, whether they were worried about the fate of humanity. Even without hindsight, these questions seem ridiculously alarmist. Perhaps, it was the initial suspicion novel technology gets treated with, for the walkman was viewed as encouraging political apathy in youngsters, helping their detachment from their surroundings. Hosokawa explains in his paper, how the idea of the Walkman was intensely disliked by the technical department of Sony; it was simply a portable cassette-player and nothing else. The most remarkable feature of the Walkman was its mobility. The computer had already opened up a new realm of the digital. Then the walkman arrived, unassuming and minimal, yet went on to become a major hit.



The function of present day technologies is a direct antithesis of the Walkman effect. They have the sinister ability to relegate reality by laying over it a cast of partial oblivion. In the bustling attention economy, if you are what you pay attention to, how far are you yourself staring at the void? In the bustling attention economy, if you are what you pay attention to, how far are you yourself staring at the void? The Walkman gave individuals the leeway to hold onto themselves by being a selective stream of sensory input. It complemented your agency. Social media floods and erodes it. Current social media usage patterns are associated with the development of ADHD-like traits. There was a niche of films, in the early 2000s, conceptualizing technology and the internet as the non-human supernatural: think *Kairo* (2001), *The Ring* (2002), and its earlier precursors *Videodrome* (1983), *Serial Experiments Lain* (1998); all of which had one unifying tenet: constant exposure to technology contributed to neurosis or dehumanization. Amidst all this, the Walkman Effect was a tender kiss to the senses. The user had control over the boundary between the self and the world. To be precise, urbanism enhanced the Walkman effect. Plugging in your earphones did not make the metropolis around disappear. The cacophony of urban noise laid on top of the music as texture. The Doppler-effect 'swoosh' of passing cars on the highway felt transcendental when heard through *Love Will Tear Us Apart Again* by Joy Division— making the city a part of the music-listening experience. Yet most importantly, it is the scope of reflection which the Walkman provided in abundance. People visualize and ruminate to songs, think of moments from their life which resonate with the lyrics. Music is increasingly becoming a secondary accompaniment to our everyday life tasks. While most of social media is based on relatability, it almost dissolves this interiority by leaving no scope for introspection. So, what happened to the Walkman effect— this tendency for self-enclosure within a membrane of music, after the death of the Walkman ?



TIME PASSES

ASIM MUDGAL



I met someone in translation.
He said that he was from Assam.

He says:-
Your eyes are brown like cocoa-powder
and I want to milk it.
Your lips are like a rose
Let me make red wine from it.
Your neck is like porcelain
and I want to make it warmer.

He disappeared before he could reach
my stomach.

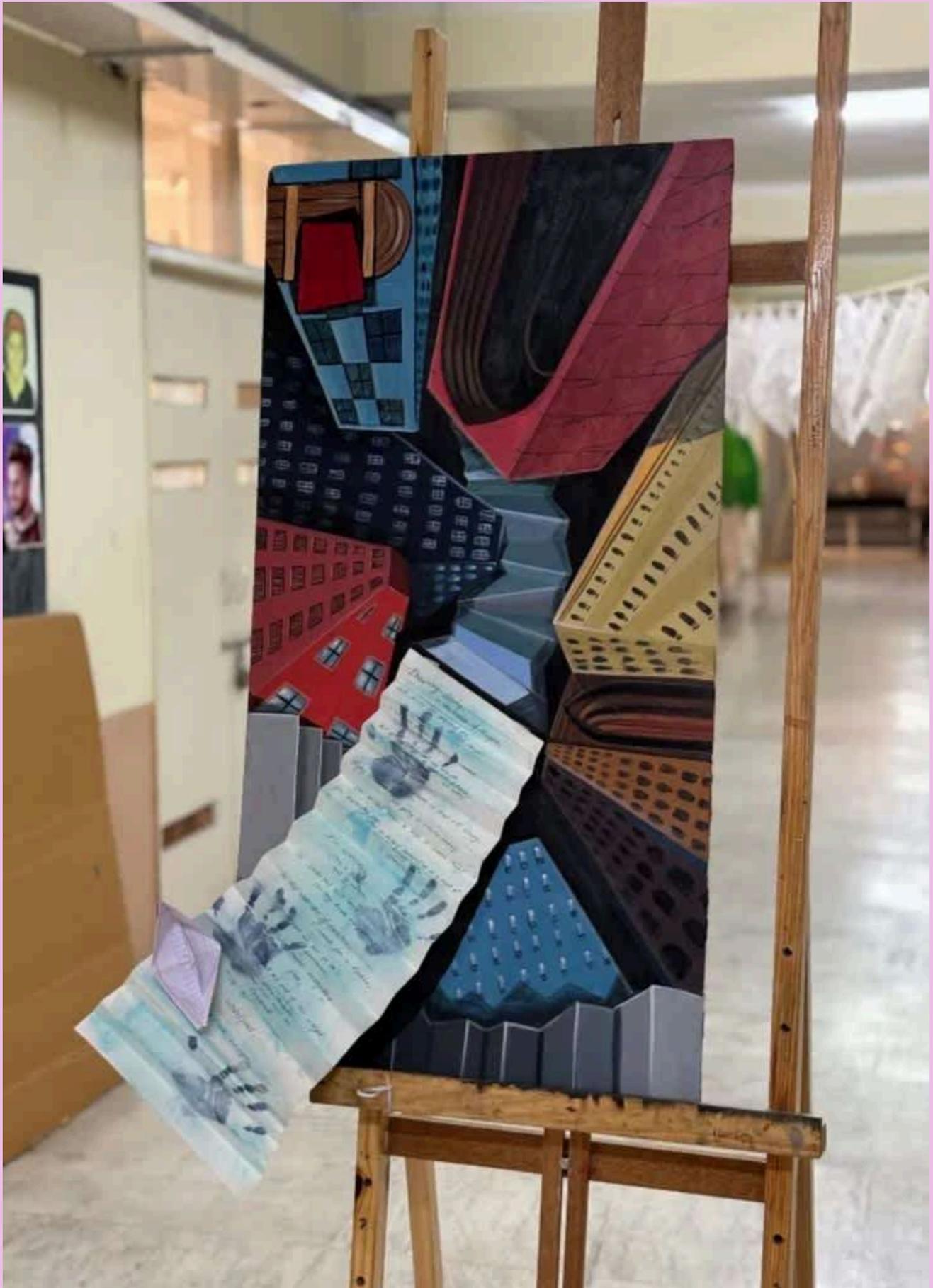
It left a taste of hunger.
I keep rewriting the translation
only to find meanings lost.

This is how Time Passes.



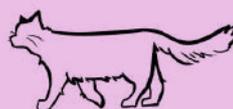
SILENT DEPTHS

PANKHURI BANSAL



CARRYING HOME

PANKHURI BANSAL



AFTER DARK

CHANDRASHMITA MITRA

The Swiss countryside after sundown presses down on his shoulders like an angel of darkness. Alpine glory like a panopticon risen again. Circular prison growth creeping up amidst the nature of things. Mountain-tops pushing upwards like jagged knives fleshing out the sky and carving a pathway for stars. Knee-deep into this late October night, a snow-capped spine-range seems suspended against the skyline. This remote town tucked away between folds of spindrift, sleeping at this time. Pin-drop silence. Somewhere a Simmental moos.

Jonas sees just two Moroccan tourists outside of a hotel, smoking and conversing in Arabic, drawing out the vowels. He's stricken by the clash of sharp smoke in this serrated cold, of the East in this Western landscape, if a clash at all. He marvels at how seamlessly it all just fits together—these people from warmer lands, so at ease in a place which could not be more different. Then again, wasn't he like them too? A pilgrim, an out-of-towner, a man searching for home inside his homelessness.

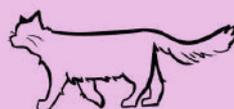
The road slopes downward. All he can hear is the whistling wind. All he can see are the rows of hotels, closed shops, apartments and cafés on either side. And the mountains. Always the mountains; overlooking its lands like a doubting despot

The moon hangs low, like a pock-marked coin, glinting.



There's only one café open at this time and a group of old local men have congregated around one of the tables set outside on the cobblestone sidewalk; but since the town's so empty, Jonas just walks on the road. It seems the cook has also joined them. He'd seen the same group of men fifteen minutes ago, drinking inside the café, on his way to the nearest and only church around here (he was actually going to the cemetery). Maybe the beer had worked them up, and they'd felt that it was now relatively safe to face the cold outside without the steady comfort of windbreakers. They're talking loudly now, a surprising thing for the Swiss, their voices reverberating, making their bellies shake, laughing like they're having the time of their lives. Maybe they are.

He walks on.



MONOGRAPH

Her name is Danika, the amiable receptionist. He's mildly surprised, asks her why she's got a Danish name. Does she have Danish roots? No, in fact her mother's an Austrian Jew, her father a Swiss German. He comments on her long hair, how it's an unusual shade of not-quite-red, teetering on the spectrum between burnt embers and maraschino cherries. She's the receptionist at the hotel where he's been staying, flat-chested and mannish in her mannerisms in a way that somehow doesn't distort the perception of her gender. The red-striped white shirt and brown straight-cut trousers bring out her innate masculinity even though she has slender shoulders and the irrevocable stamp of that abstruse feminine quotient. Her smile is orbital, expansive in a way that is subtle, the thin lip-ring she wears barely visible if not for the slight tremor of her mouth. No makeup, wet hair, lanky, with an odd gait and wild. Wild, wild, wild.

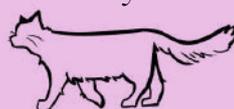


Jonas wakes up to snow the next day. With only the blanket pulled against him, he paces onto the balcony. The cold folds into his chest like a bird, an unwelcome guest here for a long stay. He has never seen snow before. Grew up in the blistering spots of the Mediterranean. Jonas lets a flake land on his palm and brings it almost to his nose. It looks like a haphazard clump of icicles, nothing like the perfection of the fern-like stellar dendrite. Jonas watches it melt on the warm heel of his pinked skin.

Post-breakfast (which was complementary) he wanders the town, walks into a Coop. A bucolic populace makes for idle shoppers, Jonas thinks. He scans aisles of grocery, picks up a four-euro piece of pie before letting it rest back on the shelf. Hard-pressed for money is the traveller that carries all of his chattels in a drooping rucksack. There's a bottle of chardonnay he's drawn to and it looks like piss, thin and yellow. He cashes it. Later, Jonas gets "punch-drunk" on the white when the church pastor drives him off the ecclesiastic grounds, shivering, because he isn't Protestant enough.

This is the trouble with tales told autobiographically; tales of a life remembered but not observed while it is being lived. They are quite the pain to arrange into chronological narratives because memory is less reliable than knowledge. Events and people and years and experiences never line up the right way, instances slip out like a beloved's hair escaping the braid of life. We all know that the beginning is that which has nothing preceding it but everything following it, but the truth is, we're all swinging by Kurt Vonnegut-style. Many tales even have several openings. Jonas perhaps is searching for the one that never ends. Every no-hoper is a reflection of their defeat, and every defeat merely a pit-stop.

He falls asleep before it even gets dark and wakes up the same—mundane and changed, because somewhere someone had once said that success never feels as good as failure feels bad. Jonas might not know this, but he will eventually leave for where we all go to die, yet where our story never ends.



AT SURESH BHAIIYA'S TEA STALL

JAHNVI BORGHAIN

When I moved to Delhi in 2022 to pursue my Master's degree, I carried with me the weight of two precious lost years and a lifetime of restrictions. The pandemic had stolen my undergraduate years, leaving me with memories not of bustling campuses, but of deafeningly silent afternoons spent at home, locked away in my tiny room. I had grown up in an environment familiar to so many girls in India - one that was shaped by love, but also by control. My father's rules and my mother's constant worry would force me to live under a 7pm curfew even at twenty-two. I had never known what it meant to walk through a city at night, or to feel free in my own footsteps.

My life in North Campus, Delhi University, changed that forever.

Stepping onto that campus felt like stepping into a world that had been waiting for me all along. Vishwavidyalaya, as it is famously called, was so much more than just a collection of colleges and hostels. It represented for me a brand-new kind of freedom, one that I had never experienced before. For the first time, I lived away from home, in a hostel room whose narrow bed and creaky cupboards became symbols of a second chance for me - at youth, and at life. I learned how to catch the local public bus, how to bargain

with auto-waale bhaiyas for ten rupees, and how to survive on a diet of maggie and momos – all at the ripe young age of twenty-two.

It was here that I also learned what it meant to claim space as a woman. I remember the first time I dared to step out into the streets late at night. It wasn't anything dramatic, just a walk to a small tea stall everyone called Suresh Bhaiya's. The tea stall was hidden deep inside a narrow road tucked away in Hudson Lane, and only the true stalwarts of the North Campus knew about it.

I was extremely nervous, clutching my shirt tightly and scanning the streets, anticipating everything wrong that could possibly happen. I could get hit by a speeding Haryana Roadways bus, or get kidnapped for a heavy ransom, or worst of all, I could end up getting a phone call from my mother telling me how I have gone “completely out of hand.”

Despite my crippling anxiety, I ended up going out that night because two of my friends, both classmates I had only recently met, insisted that I shouldn't miss out on one of the most quintessential North Campus experiences, which apparently was a midnight chai-break. By the end of that night, over six tiny glasses of overly sweetened chai, those two ended up becoming my closest friends.



MONOGRAPH

Now, it is important to mention here that Suresh Bhaiya's shop was more than just a tea stall. It was a living, breathing organism of North Campus itself. You could see clusters of students banging on tables and debating politics with a passion that only a fresher in college can muster. You would find heartbroken lovers quietly crying into tiny glass cups over a love that had ended too soon. And in the lonelier corners, you would encounter homesick students stare empty into the steam rising from their tea, reminiscing their homes and families.

We sat there too, enjoying the hustle-bustle around us. Back then we were nothing more than three broke college students sharing one paratha between us, joking about our poverty, with each of us pretending that we weren't hungry just so that the others could eat more.

For me, every night at that stall stitched together a new identity. From being a girl too afraid to ride the metro, I became someone who could navigate the chaotic streets of Delhi with the utmost confidence. For someone raised to believe that safety lay only within four walls, stepping out into those streets felt radical, and each late-night walk ended up becoming an act of rebellion, a way of rewriting what freedom could mean for a young girl like me.

Over those two years, the lanes of North Campus became my home, and Suresh Bhaiya's tea stall became my safe space. It was where I shed the fears I had carried since childhood, where I learned to step out (literally and metaphorically) into a life that felt like it belonged to me.

The city that once scared me became a space that held me gently, even in its intimidating chaos.

Today, when I think of that stall under a flickering tube light, of the sound of late-night laughter mingling with the hiss of boiling milk, and most importantly, of friendships that held me steady as I learned to hold myself, I am filled with nothing but gratitude. In those moments, Delhi gave me a life that felt like mine, and a sense of freedom that I will carry with me no matter where I go. There was no grand rebellion, and no dramatic declaration of independence, only the simple, steady realisation that I could exist outside the boundaries that had been drawn for me my whole life. Even now, whenever I sip a cup of tea late at night, I am transported back to those pavements and to that laughter - to the girl I once was, and the woman that I was becoming.



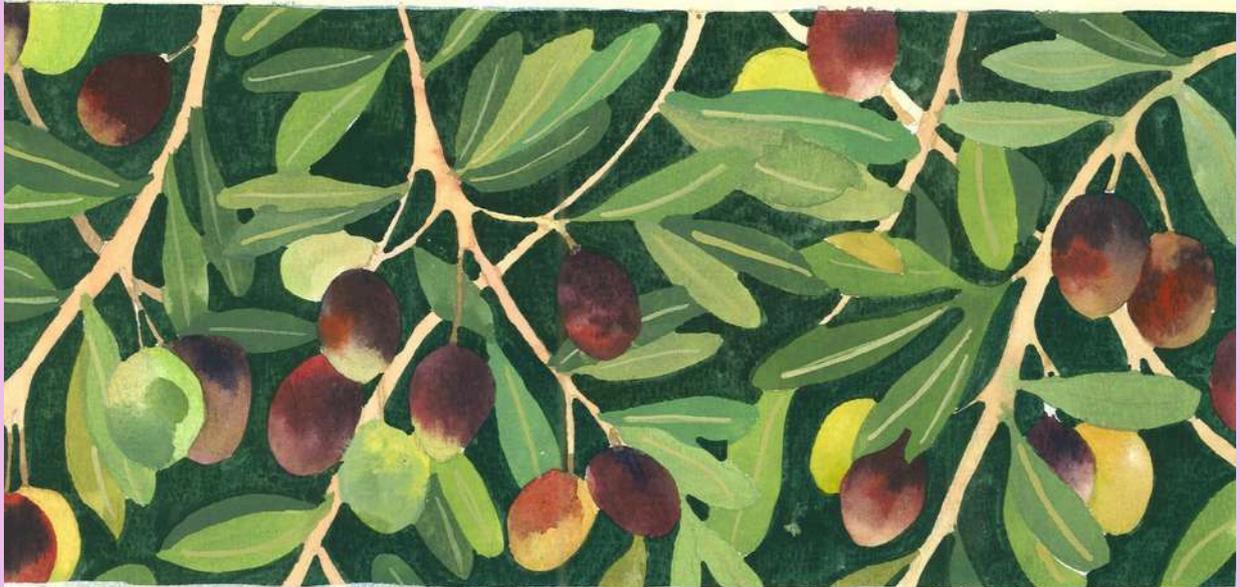
PALLANKUZHI

ARU SHUKLA



STOLEN FRUITS

ARU SHUKLA



GLORY TO THE BOARDROOM

DANE DAVIS

High-rise lifestyle, watching the stratosphere stream past. Three-hundred-and-sixty-degree glass panel views from boardroom windows. Clean and air conditioned, streamlined and comfortable. End goal for the 'career suit'. The top floor prized possession - corner office and executive title. Super-tall monoliths of concrete and steel to eclipse the sun and cast ominous shadows down. Skyscraper office spaces, floors on floors of cubicles, people penned in and stacked up. The sky's the limit. Sprouting higher and never looking down. Is this all there is to life?

Five a.m. start to your day. Strap-hanger commute and breakfast bagels from Armenian street vendors. Distant car horns and the sound of clicking heels on asphalt to infinity. Ten-foot-wide crosswalks invisible under crowds of suit pants and pencil skirts. The sidewalk hustle, wading through the crowds only to fall through the cracks in the pavement.

Where would you rather be? Seeing the beaches before your bosses bury them all in crude oil? Living your middle-class lifestyle before vulture capitalists pull it out from under you? Being with your family and friends before they die without the healthcare coverage your firm denies? Corporate speak, becomes unbearable. Reading between the lines of fluff jargon - saying a lot while saying nothing at all. Or better yet, saying nothing while making it sound like everything. Corporate nonsense emails to glaze over your eyes and freeze up your brain.

Corporate jargon emails read:

...Our feature set is unparalleled, but our six-sigma magnetic process management and user-proof operation is considered an amazing achievement. If we scale extensibility we may have to evolve transparently. The web service factor can be summed up in one word: open-source...

Ad nauseum, email after email of nothing-speak. Cornflower blue Winchester shirts and the briefcase blues. Vacant eyes on wall graphs for boring board meetings. Selling souls away for an artery hooked to a money drip. Keep the gravy train running. Counterfeiting American dreams and tonight, they'll laugh and choke at cocktail party anecdotes. Selling lies and stealing promises and buying trust all at the loan of a pen. His perfect teeth and handsome smile signal sincerity. You've seen it all before, the old dog and pony show, and feel the tedium at the conman's playbook. Tired and well-versed. Duping with a grace, the simple common man. A farmer or contractor, trusting us with the finer details. Trusting us not to screw him in the small print.



Corporate jargon, designed to bewilder. Crafting language to obscure and uninform, intentionally vague but precise and professional. Hiding the clause in plain sight. Hiding confusion and often corruption right in front of the dupe who's ready to sign on the dotted line. Pages and pages of platitudes and banalities. Corporate jargon terms and conditions read:

...Progressively conceptualize corporate capitalists to continually facilitate real-time global vertical leadership. Accurate 24/365 B2C will dramatically enhance and consolidate compelling e-markets and objectively scale customized alignments...

A made-up language deciphered as bullshit. You watch the act play out. The old you wouldn't care, but now you're old yourself and can't help it. The self-conscious old scammer, you think of yourself. Water cooler whispers behind your back. 'Past his best, past his prime.' Knowing this scene - it's well-rehearsed. Turn your back for a second, and handsome smiles become deadly sharpened teeth.

'Friends' to fall over themselves, to sell you out and rip you off. 5'9" is a long way to fall. 'It's only business' they'll laugh at you. 'It's a young man's game' they'll dismiss, out of hand. Before going home for the day to their two-car garage and backyard swimming pool. Humdrum rat race, keyboard typing your life away. Measuring your hopes and dreams against zeros and ones. You've watched all your old colleagues ride the ranks up through promotion. Corporate ladder climb, quick and breezy. While you're left with stale coffee in Styrofoam and mountains of paperwork.

Thousand-dollar suits and a Champagne breakfast for the boardroom elite. Bulls and bears and record-breaking quarterly profits. Tycoon investment sprees, to tear down and build up anew. To recycle the old and sell it for twice the price. That's what ambition gets you. Instead, you live the rat race existence. Do rats ever feel this alone? Crammed subway cars home to empty shoebox living rooms. No one to greet you at the door. Ikea Sundays alone, binge-buying junk you don't need. Monday to Friday grind reminds you, every day is exactly the same.



Counting down days to your pension. No more twenty-year gold Rolexes, cost-cutting measure. Life, slipping away from you. Office cubicles, slightly smaller than rent-controlled studios. Company man 'til the day you die and hating every minute of it. Hating them for every moment they take from you and turn into a salary for themselves, ten times what you make in a year. Your dreams are of endless oceans and vast redwood forests. They can't be seen over towering concrete and blinding smog. Can't be seen under hung heads and crushing monotony. Can't be seen past the suits and ties and hundred-dollar haircuts. City living isn't what it used to be, exciting and stimulating. Now it feels dangerous and threatening. Now you're scared all the time. You don't understand this way of life anymore. Or the point of living it.

You used to write letters home to dustbowl childhoods. Ancient memories now. Parents were characters out of a Rockwell painting. Always benevolent. Always well-wishing. Always reminding - you had a home to come back to and a family that loved you. Never making it back for good, though. Ambitions for career climbing, persistent past the point of no return. Always giving it 'One more year', to turn things around, in the city. Stayed in the rat race out of habit. A comfort zone slowly dulling your spirits.

Remembering your folks getting old stabs at your heart. How afraid it made you when they died. That same fear flashes across you now, thinking about your own age. Remembering great plain porches in summer evenings and wheatfield baseball diamonds of bygone days. Don't reminisce for too long. Saccharine nostalgia leaves a hard lump to swallow.

Forecast set for sunshine. Look up to see the beautiful baby blue, only to find the grey canvas of hundred-story-high skyscrapers. You feel buried under city living. It's collective weight on your shoulders. Pushing you down into the ground, leaving you hunched and broken. You won't know how to live, until you die. Only a matter of time before they force you out. Mandatory retirement to sit around and watch daytime T.V. to sit around and watch how other people live.

Your job is your life. You hate to admit it, but you know it. What else do you have? What else is there? Golf on Sundays? Your idea of hell. Bumping into old colleagues on the eighteenth hole? Being asked what you're doing with your time now? Them, pretending to care. You, reluctant to answer, finally making up a half-hearted lie. No thanks. You worry all the time now and people are starting to notice. The whispers are getting louder and less discreet. It's palpable in the air, they're going to make you retire. Choices worn thin - being made redundant from a job you hate and left to live a life you've never experienced and now don't fully understand.



Take the pressure off, have a drink. Hole in the wall, hipster chic. Lunch time cocktail, suit sticks out. Makes you self-conscious. Everyone's cool and relaxed but you can't relate until your four drinks in. Until the tension in your shoulders' fades. Wash away the day's grind with suds and alcohol. Drown down the sun and extinguish the day into night. Just to wake up and do it all again tomorrow. Everyone knows how to live... just not you. Temples turned into casinos and God has always been the love of money. To not worship the Almighty is blasphemy. Sinners are bound to the purgatory earth, to only ever look up and wonder about the high-rise world of Elysium.

Out of place and out of time. You don't belong to this life. Fate or destiny or the universe or whatever else you believe in - Krishna - has made some terrible mistake and there's been some sort of mix up. You're not a suit and you're not a number cruncher. You're not a bean counter. You don't care enough to be. You never have. You are not your job, no matter how much it forces itself on you. No matter how much it taints and stains you. No matter how much it tries to crawl inside you and oppress and command your soul.

You don't belong here. You are the ocean and the desert and the forest. You are the life you want to live and the adventure you choose for yourself. You were given life but never shown how to live. In another life you are a beach bum or a mountain man. You are a cattle rancher or a fruit picker traveling around with the changing seasons. Your skin is dirt-tanned from working in the open all day and your hands are callused and sore and tough. But the sweat on your brow feels earned and the air in your lungs feels real. An outdoor childhood. A prairie upbringing. And then an urban manhood, safe and easy and clean. Almost emasculating. How did you ever get so far away from your roots?

You dream of love when you're not dreaming of redwoods and oceans. Dreams of weeks spent drunk on women and euphoric in living. Dreams of whiskey sour lunches and dinner conversations with the good-time Charlies. Dreams of a woman to love and hold and protect. But that faint pang and crushing defeat that rushes through you is the reminder - you're not strong enough. To love madly and be loved madly back is a fantasy. It's too late now. Like they said, you're 'past your best.' You're too old and this life is no place for the elderly. Time to do what old men do best... sit back and relax, this won't hurt at all.



MONOGRAPH



Glimmers of the baby blue sky, weak through the concrete and smog. Strips of the world seen behind office blocks like iron bars of commercial pillars. Like happiness, seen and understood but never felt and never known. No early retirement to kill this pain. Finally come to a peroration - either you're alive or you're not. Go out the way you never lived... spectacularly. You write the last email you'll ever draft and send it to the whole building. Who cares now? Send it to people you never knew and whom you never will. Every department, accounting and purchasing. Marketing and HR. Informal layman's reads:

...Tired of not getting ahead. Tired of having to work so hard. Tired of itchy slacks and conforming tie colour palettes. Tired of loneliness. Tired of barely knowing the person working right next to me, a foot away behind a cubicle wall. Tired of being afraid of the future. Tired of society's expectations. Tired of emails comprised of bullshit and jargon. Tired of waiting around for retirement. Tired of waiting around for nothingness. Tired of getting old. Tired of... not living...

Ride the elevator to the top floor and let them watch and wonder. High-rise suicide, it's crossed all their minds at some point or other. Stock's dip and suddenly those windows look very tempting. No pulling back. No escape once you commit. Only one way down if you make that call. Hundred-storey drop is a long way to go.

'Why'd he do it?' they'll ask, and the answer will never be understood by the likes of them - it just got too hard, too often.

But from this height everywhere is calm. No wonder they love it up here. At this height you can see the oceans and redwoods and the deserts and the wheatfield baseball diamonds. You can see the lakes of whiskey sours and the good time Charlies and the beautiful women you're not afraid to love madly.

At this height you can't see the hundred-dollar haircuts or the cracks in the pavement or hear the clicking business shoes to infinity. Up here you can see the sky as it's meant to be seen, not through bars of uniform banality. Up here everything's beautiful. Everything's peaceful. Everything's serene. Shame you have to sell your soul to see it.



BETWEEN THOUGHT AND FORM

JAYASREE GHOSH



ADAPTING KOJIMA FOR AMERICA

ANURAAG DAS SARMA



Boomers love Contra. When it came out in 1987, it was difficult not to, and over time, through repeated legitimisation in pop culture, it became the de facto video game of the 80's - the narrative of a "lonely fighter saving the world" preserved in all its triteness. While Konami, for the original Japanese release, marketed Contra as a game set in the distant world of 2633, the American release significantly downplayed the futuristic setting; later releases of the game for the NES and PC would completely retcon the story - switching the future for the present and the Galuga archipelago for the Amazon jungle.

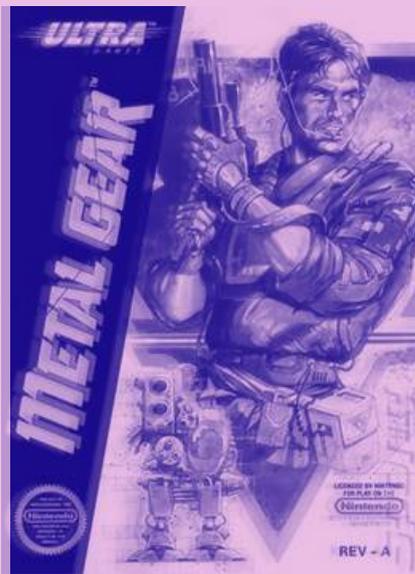
This was Rambo's America, where the drugs were fresh, Vietnam was more than a distant memory, and the Mujahideens were political friends who'd help beat the Soviets. The Amazon jungles of the present-day were the perfect setting for a generation used to Ollie North, who at the time was trafficking arms to Iran in order to fund the Contras of Nicaragua. American audiences were used to proxy wars in distant rainforests, and Konami did not need a futuristic setting to sell the games in the West as they did in Japan. The change was also an extremely easy one, since the video game has no dialogue and no story. The plot existed only on the accompanying hard-copy manuals, and printing a few sheets of paper was an expense easily justified. They didn't even change the final screen that plays out when the game ends. In both versions, it still read:

**CONGRATULATIONS!
YOU'VE DESTROYED THE VILE RED
FALCON AND SAVED THE UNIVERSE.
CONSIDER YOURSELF A HERO.**



The Japanese liked to imagine Red Falcon as this futuristic, evil-doing, nefarious organisation. The Americans liked to think of them as dirty commies. But just one change in the narrative meant Konami could sell copies either way.

1987 also saw the release of another Konami game - one that individuals today might be more familiar with simply because of the franchise it wrought. Metal Gear (no solid, not yet).



Metal Gear, despite releasing in the same year, is a markedly different game from Contra. It was the first game Hideo Kojima would develop, and Konami did not necessarily have great ambitions for it. Kojima would go on to develop and direct the Metal Gear Solid franchise for the next 28 years, but in 1987, no one could have foretold the far-reaching effects MGS.

would have on popular culture as a whole.

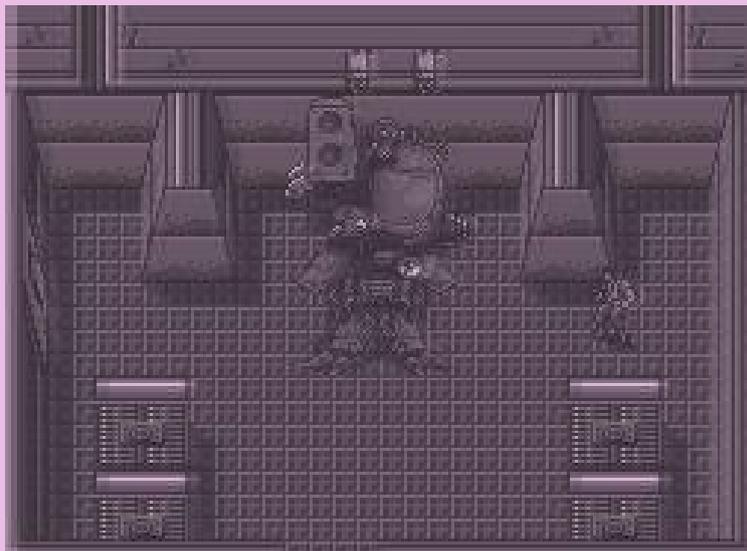
Initially meant as a simple action game with military combat, the hardware limitations of the MSX2 (the platform for which the game was being developed) rendered the original idea ineffective. Kojima, the ever-clever developer, decided he would rather create a game focused on stealth - one that was heavily inspired by the 1963 Steve McQueen film: The Great Escape.

It was a hit, not only bringing tactical stealth games into the cultural zeitgeist but also creating a niche for cinematic videogames - something Kojima would go on to perfect in the coming years. But that first game in the series, the one that would birth a genre, was still not what Konami considered entirely fit for American audiences. In 1988, the NES port of Metal Gear would be released in North America. Published by Konami's American subsidiary, the NES and Famicom ports start off with an entirely different cutscene. Instead of Solid Snake infiltrating Outer Heaven, the NES version has him parachute off a plane into a jungle in a style reminiscent of Stallone in Rambo II: First Blood (1985). Unlike Kojima's original, Metal Gear NES does not delve immediately into-



stealth. Instead, Snake's first interaction after the radio call with Big Boss is an enemy soldier who dozes off to sleep the moment you step into frame. The MSX2 version, on the other hand, has you sneak past soldiers who are awake, alive, and ready to shoot from the get-go. The enemy, in this case, is good at their job, and Japanese audiences seemingly did not require their Solid Snake to depend on a guard's tiredness.

There were many more changes in the NES version, including jungle mazes which resembled Vietnam more than Kojima's vision for a fortress 200km north of South Africa. The American version seemed much more attuned to American ideas of war than the global narrative Kojima would go on to forge in the years to come. Gameplay, too, underwent a significant change. The levels designed for the NES suffered from major issues, such as frequent backtracking. As enemies respawned every time you entered a room, it not only made stealth an extremely inadvisable strategy but also turned the entire game into one that was action-first.



Both games suffered from erroneous translation; localisation errors would persist in later releases, but considering the nascent stage of video games (especially those made for home computers and consoles) in the 1980s, the translation mistakes did little but add some much-needed humour to the game.

The franchise would really kick things off with Metal Gear Solid's release in 1998, and as Kojima's video games grew more cinematic through cutscenes and spoken dialogues, localisation and adaptation focused more on translating voice lines than editing game levels or design.

Jeremy Blaustein, the translator for Metal Gear Solid, writing for Polygon, explains his-



artistic vision in great detail and without him, that first MGS game might not have become as big as it did. While Snake's constant habit of repeating words and framing them as questions would become a meme (as most things in Metal Gear Solid do), the gameplay remained entirely unchanged, and so did the story. The translator's job thus became more difficult. As Blaustein put it:

"I felt like I was inside his [Kojima] head during the project, not unlike one of those FBI guys who track serial killers. And yet it became clear that Japanese culture is not as precise, brutal, or jaded about war as we're used to in the United States. This was true even in the years before our culture was shaken up by 9/11 and Abu Ghraib. Reading Rogue Warrior and other books helped me understand how the military speaks to itself, and I wanted to show that Snake and Col. Campbell were professional soldiers. That had to come from how they spoke to each other, and the other characters in the game."

The translator's job, especially in the world of video games, is a difficult one. Blaustein not only had to translate the words - he had to understand the underlying emotions in a Kojima game, he had to understand the archetypes of the characters, and then he would have to ensure that the translated lines would exactly match the cinematic edits that Kojima had incorporated into the cutscene down to the millisecond. And throughout it all, his translated voice lines would have to affect the English-speaking consumer in the same way Kojima's affected a native Japanese speaker. No wonder he was taking valium and smoking cigarettes like a chimney throughout the entire process.

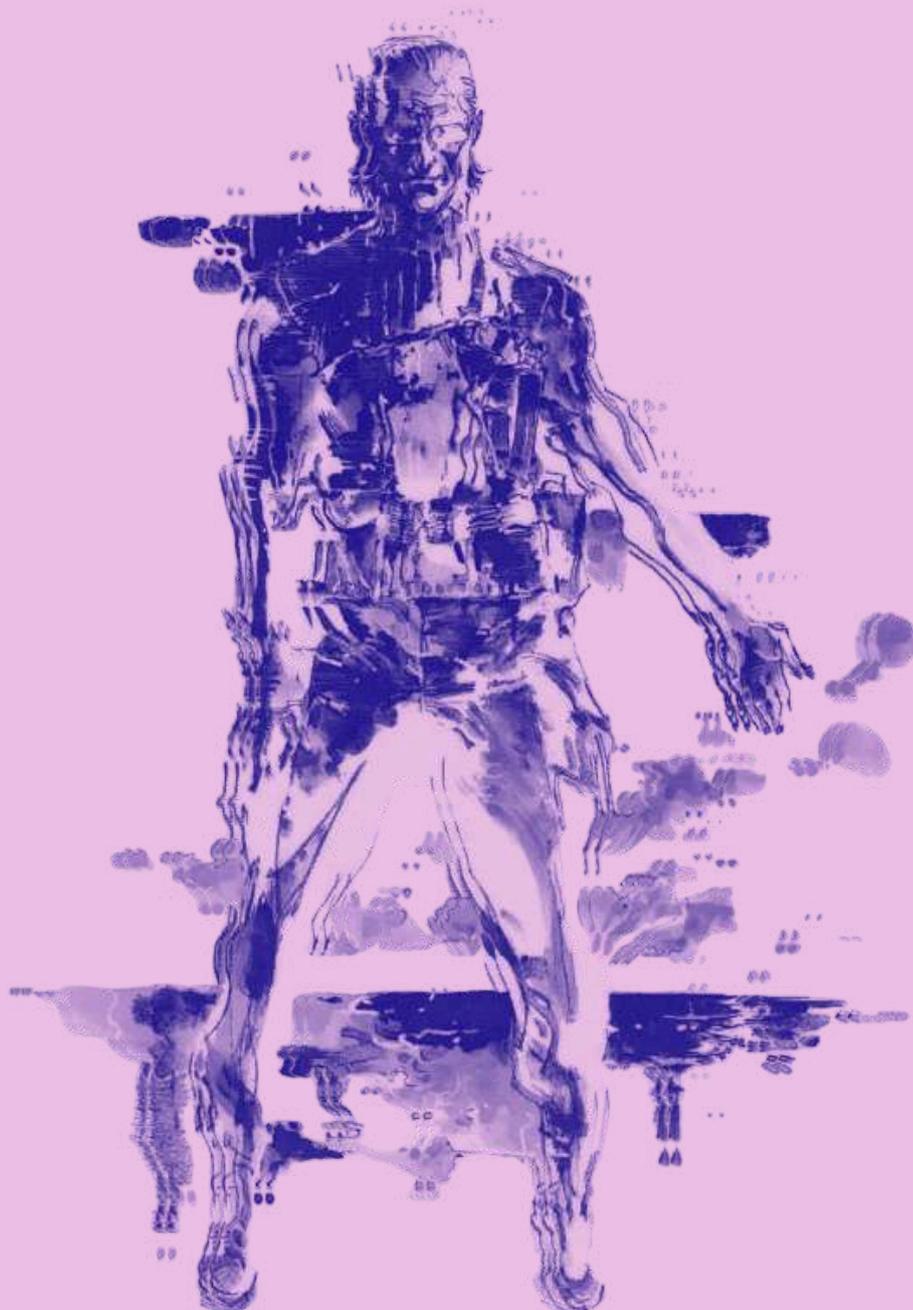
While originally appreciative of Blaustein's translation, Kojima would later grow to dislike how different the localisation was for American audiences. As he became larger than Konami itself and MGS became one of the most popular video game franchises in the world, the publishers spent more time ensuring that his vision would explicitly shine through in all languages. This resulted in his dialogue often becoming the poster-boy for heavy-handed storytelling- doing wonders for the man, for no matter how many times I joke about the dialogue, there is something about Kojima's love for absolutely bat shit insane plotlines and melodramatic exposition with a dash of camp that I would not trade for the world.



I have no doubt that had Blaustein continued to work as a translator for MGS, I would have still enjoyed the games and even loved the transcated dialogue intended for American audiences, but then we would not have gems like this:

“Sad... So sad... A host of sorrows... And you are one of them. I am The Sorrow. Like you, I too am filled with sadness. This world is one of sadness... Battle brings death, death brings sorrow... The living... may not hear them. Their voices... may fall upon deaf ears, but make no mistake: the dead are not silent. Now you will know the sorrow of those whose lives you have ended!”

And I do not know how I would feel about that.



WHAT THE FOREST WHISPERS

DAFNE VENET GUAJARDO TREVIÑO

Dancing, prancing, sly and sweet,
they come and go at will—
from the moss-ring they feast
among the flowers and the bees.

They build the littlest of stairs,
for only their feet are fit to step—
and scatter teeth and tears
beneath the sunken earth,
coating the roots of grasses and meadow herbs
in reckless devil-may-care.

They play a game of truth and dare,
dallying in every human affair—
and before you know it,
they wind you round their wrist
trapping you in spider-silk mist.

You may not know their faces or their names,
but they are whispered through the forest
as the devilish faes.

DEOMBA

RICHARD AFRIYIE

(Co, atomic number 27)

When the river speaks
it whispers your name,
when the earth sighs
she heaves a body

mother stutters
when the tunnels inhale
we hold our breath
when they exhale
the line on the screen
stumble flat.

We trudge again
across a grit of blue dust
toward little mounds with no names-
shouldering the weight
of a cleaner world.



THEREBY HANGS A TALE

SHREYA DATTA

A woman has a weak spine, a condition her children were familiar with and were unsurprised by. This was because she was always “bent over”. This subservient woman, as described by her feminist daughter and son, held on to her own in a traditional, orthodox North Indian family. Mai represented the second generation of women in this joint family setting, cloaked in her purdah but still permitted to speak at home. Freedom of speech at home was a radical privilege granted to women of the second and third generations, as *dadi* remained mute in front of *dada*. All three generations battled with accommodating or challenging patriarchy through the institution of the family. But it was only *mai* who developed a weak spine. It was *mai* who shouldered the responsibility of building a ladder for her children, for her daughter, who couldn't end up like her.

Mai, written by Gitanjali Shree in Hindi and translated by Nita Kumar, received the Sahitya Akademi word in 2022 for depicting the Indian family with its flaws. Gitanjali Shree's debut novel, *Mai* or “silently mother” grapples with the joint family setting– the patriarchy, the unrelenting father, *mai* herself, the mute grandmother and two rebellious children. Through a complex web of casteist socialisation, the children grow up with their mother bent over and hovering over the patriarch. They notice a stark difference in the ambience of the house after the death of the third generation, giving rise to *mai* being “un-silent.” It becomes the aim of the children, like most, to rescue their mother, to protect her from the Leviathan like oppressive family structure. The process of saving takes place in unexpected and unfashionable ways. Subhangi Srivastava argues in her paper (titled “Mothers, Daughters and More – Exploring the Kaleidoscope of Female Experiences in Geetanjali Shree’s *Mai* and *Tomb of Sand*”) that female agency and individuality has been specifically studied by feminist authors like Virginia Woolf, Mary Coolidge and Dora Marsden. Female individuality and the rise of a female centric vocabulary can be traced to Western writing. As seen in Virginia Woolf's “A Room of One's Own”, the production of female literature has been an act of resistance, especially because previous forms of literature have been “hardened by men.” In the context of the importance of the female voice lies *Mai*, which studies this erasure of women from everyday existence. As Woolf further argues that all mothers and daughters are left with “traditions”, *Mai*'s audience grapples with the question of what to pass on and what to not.



A lucid novel written in Hindi, Nita Kumar admits to producing an interpretation of Mai. She crafts the lacking vocabulary that is needed to extrapolate the private domestic lives of women that silently carry on and carry forward the burden of life. The translator gives birth to a feminist novel, not one that speaks of women, but one where its feminism functions in layers. Mai's name is revealed later in the novel, a quiet erasure having taken off. The novel is also an example of feminist writing because it observes the past and allows the protagonist to reinvent and reshape it, free from the clutches of her mother's makeshift ladder. The inside of the house is the theater of action, but the daughter breaks open its doors. The small act of being visible in the courtyard of the house, is magnified in the novel. These seemingly small acts of resistance make it truly feminist, in a broad as well as narrow sense.

The novel also examines questions on caste and the intersectionality between perceived identities. The existence of “thymos” (Frances Fukuyama) or the need to be defined by personal identity, gains resonance in the novel. It does not portray a reductionist critic of a woman, but offers insight into all marginalised communities. Mai's family is upper caste, keeping their servants and attendants out of their living quarters. They tend to their private lives, only with the constant attendance of their servants. The duality of seeking freedom for your mother, while perpetuating a similar system of servitude can be jarring. However, the theme of coexistence, when all children play together in the garden of their estate or when they share sweets and other treats with their attendants, outshines this deliberate difference in attitude.

Thereby hangs a tale. A tale of three generations of women. A tale of paradoxes, of birds flying in the vast sky still chained to their cage. Of mothers building new rungs on their ladders to make sure their children get out safely. Of daughters who want to be exactly like their mother, but nothing like her.



MOTHER WAS

ANUSKA SAHA

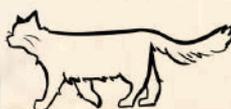
Mother was a touch first
Fresh from the bath in the hot summer
the smell of soap, each one that she used
became her lullaby
rocking constellations to dewy sleep,
her eruptions – a trick of the moon.

She turned garlic and kitchen
waste,
after-shift sweat to warm honeyed milk;
Magicked away chalk dust and school lunch
stench with fresh-cut mangoes.

Mother was a sight
Shining centre of the crowd
Immaculate in red, pink and indigo
She turned my raincloud silences,
absences and poor appearances,
into gold-ribboned apologies;
My laughter to tears
tears to laughter, always
when it was least welcome.



On certain winter afternoons
full of remote island rituals
Mother becomes a vagueness
A presence never not there,
forever at my bedside, waiting
for an answer, checking for signs –
the unopened water bottle
the empty teacups, the untouched
sweater she left on my bed a week ago –
since then
I've been busy learning how to don the cold.
Because warmth always is, waiting
in the next room, because
Mother is, as mother was
and will be.



THE TRANSLATOR'S DAUGHTER

GHAZIEA BASHIR

When I was seven, I learned that my voice could save my mother's life.

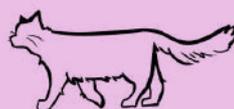
It was a Tuesday in November. I know because Tuesdays were when Mrs. Holloway let us choose our own books from the wooden crate in the corner, and I had been waiting all week to finish the one about the girl who sailed around the world alone. Her name was Tilly, and she had red hair and a boat called The Seagull, and I had stayed up past my bedtime three nights in a row reading by the sliver of light under my door. But I never got to choose my book that day. Instead, a woman I didn't know appeared at our classroom door, her face flat and unreadable, and she whispered something to Mrs. Holloway. Mrs. Holloway's hand went to her chest, the way grown-ups do when they're pretending not to be scared. Then I was walking down the long hallway with my backpack half-zipped, my favorite pencil—the one with the chewed eraser—rolling somewhere on the linoleum behind me. I didn't stop to pick it up. I didn't know why I didn't stop. Something in the woman's silence told me not to.

The woman didn't speak Spanish. She kept saying things too fast, words that piled on top of each other like cars in a highway crash. I understood maybe half. Your mother. Documents. Come with me. Don't be scared. But her eyes said something else. Her eyes said run and stay at the same time, and I didn't know which one to believe.

I was not scared. I was seven. I did not yet know what fear tasted like.

My mother was sitting in the principal's office. The room smelled like lemon polish and old paper, the kind of clean that doesn't belong to people like us. Her hands were folded in her lap, the way she folded them during Mass, except her knuckles were white and her lips were moving without sound. She was praying. She was always praying when the world got too loud. When she saw me, she reached for my hand and pulled me close, and I felt the tremble in her fingers, felt the fear she had been hiding behind her folded hands.

“Tell them,” she whispered in Spanish, her voice so low I almost didn't hear. “Tell them I am her mother. Tell them I have papers. Tell them we have done nothing wrong.”



So I told them.

I told the woman with the fast words that my mother was born in a village called San Miguel, where the houses are painted blue and yellow and the roosters wake everyone at four in the morning. I told her that my mother came here when she was nineteen, with nothing but a dress and a photo of her own mother and a rosary wrapped around her wrist. I told her that she cleaned houses and offices and sometimes the church on Sundays, that she never complained, that she sent money home every month even when we didn't have enough for ourselves. I told her that my mother had papers, green cards, social security numbers, all of it in a folder under the mattress because that was the safest place, according to my aunt who had been here longer. I told her that we had done nothing wrong, that my mother had never even gotten a parking ticket, that she drove exactly the speed limit always, that it drove my father crazy.

The woman looked at me. Then she looked at my mother. Then she looked at a man in a dark jacket who had been standing in the corner, silent as a shadow.

“She's seven,” the man said. “She can't be the interpreter.”

“She's all we've got,” the woman said. That was the first time I translated for my mother. It would not be the last.

By the time I was ten, I had translated at parent-teacher conferences, at the doctor's office when my brother had an ear infection, at the bank when they tried to charge fees we didn't understand, at the grocery store when the cashier accused my mother of using expired coupons. I translated letters from the school, from the landlord, from the immigration lawyer who charged too much and did too little. I translated the news when there was a raid in the next town over, translated the warnings, translated the fear. I became a bridge between my mother's world and the world that kept asking her for papers, for proof, for explanations she didn't have the words to give.

My mother would look at me after each translation, her eyes searching my face for the truth behind the words. “Is that really what they said?” she would ask.

“Did you tell them everything?”



I always told her yes. I always told them everything. But I also learned, somewhere along the way, that translation is not just words. It is tone. It is timing. It is knowing when to soften a sharp edge and when to leave it sharp so they understand how much it hurts. It is the weight of a pause, the shape of a sigh, the way a sentence can carry a thousand meanings depending on where you place the silence.

When the man at the bank said “insufficient funds,” I said “not enough money right now, mami, but soon.” When the teacher said “your daughter is exceptionally bright but she needs to speak English at home,” I said “she says you're doing great, keep reading, keep reading every night like you do.” When the immigration officer said “your case is complicated,” I said nothing at all for three days, and then I said “they need more papers, that's all, just more papers. We'll find them. We always do.”

I learned to translate silence, too. The silence of my mother when she couldn't find the words. The silence of the officials when they had already decided. The silence of the phone when it didn't ring with news. I learned that sometimes the most important thing you can translate is the thing no one is saying out loud.

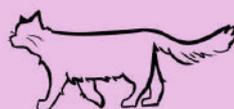
The year I turned fifteen, my mother got sick. Not the kind of sick that gets better with medicine, but the kind that collects in the corners of the body like dust, slow and patient and impossible to sweep away. The doctors used words I had to look up later: metastasized, prognosis, palliative. I translated them into Spanish for my mother, one by one, watching her face change with each syllable.

“Metastasized,” I said, “means it traveled. Like a migrant. It went looking for a new home.”

“Prognosis,” I said, “means how much time. But they don't know for sure. No one knows for sure. Not really.”

“Palliative,” I said, “means they will make you comfortable. They will take away the pain. You won't hurt anymore, mami. I promise.”

My mother nodded. She reached for my hand, the same way she had reached for it in the principal's office eight years before. Her fingers were thinner now, the skin almost transparent, but the grip was the same. The grip said you are mine and I am yours and none of this matters because we have each other.



“You always found the right words,” she said. “Even when you were little. Even when the words were too big for your mouth. You found them.”

I wanted to tell her that I had not found them. I had stolen them. I had taken English word by word, year by year, hoarding them like currency against the day when I would need to spend them all at once. I wanted to tell her that I was not brave, that I was just the only one who could, that necessity is not the same as courage. I wanted to tell her that every word I ever spoke for her was also a word I spoke for myself, because without her I would have no words at all.

But I did not say any of that. I just held her hand and translated the silence between us.

She died on a Tuesday in April. I know because Tuesdays were when I used to choose my own books, and now I cannot read on Tuesdays without seeing her face. The funeral was small. The church smelled like candles and grief. My father did not cry. My brother did not cry. I did not cry either, not until later, when I was alone and the silence was so loud I thought I would break.

After the funeral, I found a box under her bed. It was made of wood, painted blue like the houses in San Miguel, and inside: every report card I had ever brought home, every letter I had ever translated, every drawing I had ever made with a caption in Spanish at the bottom and English at the top, so she could read both. She had kept them all. She had underlined words in the English ones, practiced them maybe, tried to learn the language that her daughter had become fluent in while she was still struggling with hello and thank you and where is the bathroom. She had written the pronunciations in the margins, her handwriting shaky but determined. Hellow. Tank you. Bath-room.

On top of the box, a note in her handwriting: For my translator. For my voice. For my girl.

I held that note for a long time. I held it until the words blurred and the paper grew warm in my hands. I held it like she had held my hand all those years ago in the principal's office, like I was the one who needed saving now.



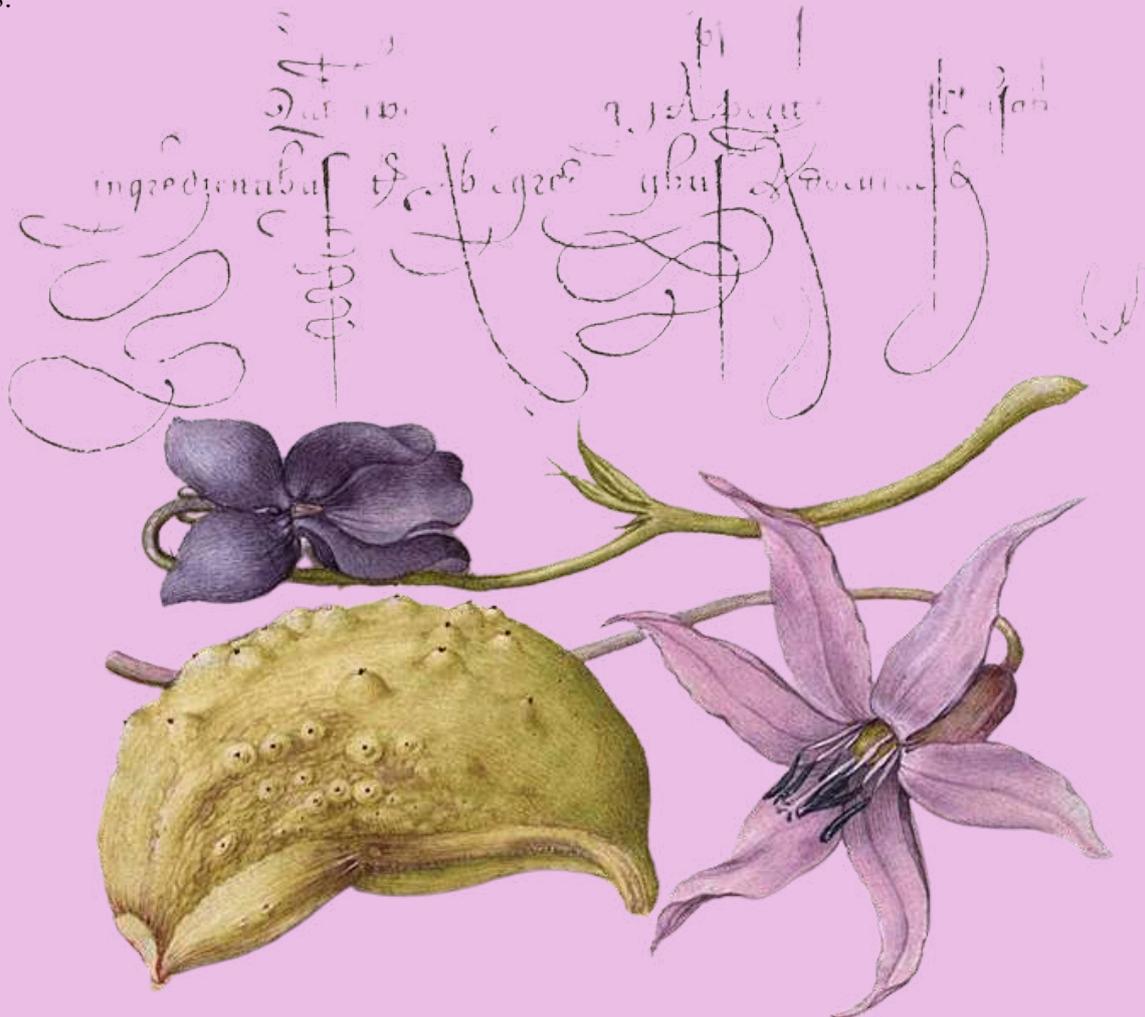
MONOGRAPH

I am twenty-three now. I work at the United Nations in New York, in a room with glass walls and headphones that let me hear the world in six languages at once. I translate speeches about climate change and human rights and global poverty. I translate negotiations between countries that have been fighting for centuries. I translate hope and desperation and compromise and rage. I sit in a booth high above the delegates, and I speak their words into a microphone, and somewhere out there, someone is listening in a language they understand.

Sometimes, when the words get too heavy, I close my eyes and I am seven years old again, standing in the principal's office, holding my mother's trembling hand, telling a stranger that we have done nothing wrong. I am ten, translating at the bank, softening the edges so she doesn't feel the shame. I am fifteen, sitting beside her hospital bed, telling her that metastasized means traveling, means searching, means looking for a new home.

I was her translator then. I am the world's translator now.

But the only voice I still hear, in every language, in every room, in every silence, is hers.



PAPER CUP TELEPHONE

TANIA SOMANNA

[I]

A pamphlet flies around in the market
 Calling for a convention
 At six that evening under the peepal tree
 A document of a sweet word
 Told through a twisted tongue,
 Pressed into young marrow

The gospel of God inscribed,
 Whispered through paper cup telephones,
 Carrying mortal propaganda,
 Twisting wrong into right,
 The word settles like dust on the scripture –
 Sixteen-year-old Masoom was to commit
 arson.

[III]

A charred, curled-up prayer
 Looks back at a silenced crowd.
 Knees kneel before a different God.
 In their unburnt homes
 They send up unburnt prayers.
 The cracking bead a metronome to their
 devotion.

[II]

At night when a green moon
 Casts a shadow over a dying prayer bead,
 War breaks out in the heavens.
 “Your God must be a miser,
 Gifting you with a life
 The length of an arm.”

The bead hangs from a tree,
 A thousand inverted faces
 Mirrored in its charcoal eyes
 Stillness rises as heat gathers.
 Blood rushes to its head.
 Prayer rushes to its lips.

By the night’s end,
 Fire answers its prayer.
 “Burn it down,” hollers a boy.
 The bead sits
 at prayer’s end.
 “There will be many others.”



IN CONVERSATION WITH ARUNAVA SINHA



For the March issue, Monograph spoke to Arunava Sinha— one of the most influential contemporary translators bringing Bengali literature into English. He reflects on the craft of translation, the ethics of carrying voices across languages, and the evolving landscape of Indian writing in translation, offering insights into both the practice and the politics of literary mediation.

MONOGRAPH: If translation begins with love as you've said, does it ever end in disillusionment? Have there been books that you fell out of love with halfway through translating?

ARUNAVA SINHA: No, I don't think it ends in disillusionment because instincts are usually not wrong for a reader. As a reader, you read a few pages of a book and you know there's something there. Now, for a translator it is really not about whether the story is gripping or it's fast-paced or anything like that, there's an intangible quality in a text that hooks you. It could be the voice that you hear and the emotional core of the text that talks to you directly, which is why it's also an emotional response rather than a purely logical one. Hence, the love. I don't think I've been disillusioned per se.

Sure, there have been times where prose has let me down a little bit, forcing me to put in more of an effort to untangle it and therefore losing some of that first spontaneous response, but on the whole, despite (translating) so many books I can't think of a single one that has suddenly helped me, you know, kind of take a leap of faith in terms of the words I want to say.

MM: You've translated everything from pulp fiction to politically charged memoirs. Is there a genre that you would say behaves badly in translation, like one that resists being carried across languages?

AS: I don't know about "resist," but the one that's toughest to translate is always humour. There's humour across every language. Because so much of the humour resides in first, the peculiarities of the language, and secondly, in certain behavioural patterns amongst your readers, who themselves are born out of a particular cultural framework. So some things that are just funny to one set of people will not be funny to another set at all, which means that you have to manufacture new ways of being funny.

And that is not everybody's forte. There's nothing to say that a translator cannot also do a great stand-up script. So, humour is often the toughest, and yes, it does resist, especially when the language is quite different from the culture.

MM: You frequently ask students to translate without over contextualising the author. In an age that is so obsessed with authorial intent, is translation, according to you, still one of the last spaces where text can still misbehave?

AS: I don't know whether it's necessarily one of the last spaces. I think any reader should allow the text to misbehave. And let's not forget that when we're reading, we're not reading with great context or specifically studying for context, right? We're reading with whatever context we're already pre-programmed with by virtue of having lived the lives that we have. So, a great book will break through any gaps in such context or intent for that matter. And we read around the world. And I don't think we stop to think about what a Mario Vargas Llosa or what a Han Kang intends or what it means in that particular context. We're just being led by the text and the text is talking to something very human in us.

And of course, like it or not, we're placing it in a context that we're familiar with. So, the question always is, do you travel towards the reader? Do you make the reader travel towards you? And mostly, I think it ends up being a case of the reader travelling towards you in a way where they take what you have and then they transform it according to their own imagination, their own worldview, their own experience and so on. You don't go and change it for them. So, that being the case, if the text is the only thing they have, there you are. And even we ourselves, I think, overestimate our ability to judge a Mario Vargas. Or for that matter, background, simply because we may be familiar with the language in which the text is written. Because, frankly, let's say a Bangla text written fifty years ago would be quite alien to your generation. Maybe the words are familiar, but much else is not familiar.

So, how do you want to judge that? We'll have to let the text say what it does not appear in. And that, in fact, is a test of a language. That it will always talk to a reader, no matter what their context, no matter what they say, no matter what they're doing. And to pin it down just to a specific authority and intent, at the time the text is written, will actually create the same experience.

MM: Do you make a distinction between your target audience and the audience of the original text as you translate? If so, does that distinction extend beyond permitting parts of the text?

AS: No, I make no distinction. For me, I am the reader. And that's what there is to them. Because I can read in both languages. There is actually no distinction. And I consider myself a reader simply because I'm the only one who can actually, I feel, validate whether the translated version is giving me the same complete set of experiences as the version which I'm translating. A complete set of experiences ranging from the emotional to the physical to the cerebral and so on to the psychological. So, I don't know. And there's no question of omitting anything. Because, you know, making this assumption on the reader's behalf that this doesn't make sense to you or this is poor and so on, then it's best not to transmit that text at all. Only once or twice have I omitted and that was for reasons of publishing rather than for any kind of editorial or literary motive. It was simply that the publisher wanted a slimmer version. So, I acted as an editor first over there rather than omitting. So, my thought was, I will edit this book into a slimmer but no worse and who knows, maybe even better version. So, that makes sense. And then I translated what I read at that time.

Other than that, the only other time when I omitted anything was when I was translating Swaradindu Bandopadhyay's books and stories which were going out to children. So, I left out the references to smoking simply because I didn't want to make it look cool even when it did look very cool in the text. So, that was a very deliberate permission, let's say. But I felt that it was alright given that it could do more harm than good.

MONOGRAPH

MM: Bengal carries histories of intimacy, revolution, exile and excess. So, in translating Bangla literature for an Anglophone audience, how do you decide what must remain culturally opaque and what can or should travel? And also, second part to this question, what is your favourite untranslatable word in Bengali and how do you approach such words while translating them?

AS: So, the first part, I am not very concerned about opacity or transparency. I am led by the text and my job is to allow the text to retain all the potential that it has in one language to retain all the potential in the other language. Now, obviously, it may open up many doorways. Not every doorway is one that the reader might be able to walk through. Maybe because what appears on the other side doesn't make sense to them.

But again, as I said, it's their job, the reader's job to come to the text rather than the text's job to walk towards the reader. My job is to make the text legible, but whether it is comprehensible is up to them. I want the reader to be able to read something and say, okay, I know what this means but what is it getting at? Where is it taking me? And that where it is taking me is the bit where the reader has to feel. And I don't want to presume on the reader's behalf and assume any kind of knowledge or any kind of lack of knowledge. Or lack of information and so on. So, since I cannot create a separate new version of the text for each individual reader, I just stick to the text and just imagine that the reader has miraculously learnt Bangla and is reading Bangla. But where he is in the world or what his culture is, he will feel that he is reading Bangla.

The second one is the words. I think the word is *dhong*, because it is used in dialogue very often and used in various contexts. It arrives, it points at the idea of someone putting on an act. But it carries so much in that one word because with it you not only get a sense of what the speaker is saying but you can also cultivate up the speaker's expressions. The look on their face, whether they are smiling or laughing. In one word you can confuse an entire group. And that is why it is used in dialogue. Otherwise you can always find some words that can be similar. But I love the fact that there are such words. I hope that we can actually borrow and lend words like these to languages like English and the text.

And then finally when you put a word into it, the first time you get the answer. The second time you get the answer. But you need to sort of put in some skills and losses to start making some sense of the word. For example, in Indian languages or Bangla, a character will very often refer to their mother-in-law and they will use the word *shashuri* almost like a proper name. *Shashuri* said this, *Shashuri* said that. This is where you can bring some metaphysics into that process. You could say *Shashuri* and then the crudest thing would be to put a parenthesis, mother-in-law and so on. But that somehow seems to me to be very easy. So I will find a way to indicate that the word refers to a mother-in-law.

She was surprised that a mother-in-law was someone like a mother-in-law would be. In that way you put in some context. You get that this word is the same and that is the same. But you don't actually do it by putting parenthesis or something like that. So that is actually what makes translation so much of a power and entertainment idea. Because sometimes when you solve a problem perfectly, you are very, very fortunate. My only hope is that I could solve the problem one way or the other. Oh no, this is what I said. And then maybe wait for the next time and solve the next problem and solve the next problem. So it's very much a process of fun learning.

MM: Many of your translations deal with voices that are politically or socially inconvenient. Do you think that translation can be a form of quiet resistance or is that asking too much of the craft?

AS: No, not at all. Translation can very much be a voice. And not necessarily a quiet resistance. Because one of the things it does is that in the process of translation, a voice that is relatively marginalised in its own language can suddenly acquire a bit of sensationalism in a translation. Because the receiving language then gives it more importance at that point because it has been chosen to be translated. And the public has chosen to understand it. Rather than very obviously trying to battle it out. So most of the time, after the translation, there is a response from the public. For the time being, it's just that there were no excises, but there were no excises in the translation.

And secondly, in India, the translator always gets to be an advocate for the language. Because we have started out as a language of feelings, right? Red and white. And therefore, if the translation is going to destroy anything, only over the past ten to fifteen years, there has been a lot of writing in India that has begun to un-hack the language. Unhack the language. So, translating ideas, or translating quieter voices, or voices that are not systematically kept away from the public can do a great deal of damage to the language.

So, the English language itself becomes a language for ideas and thoughts that become traditionally oppressive. So, there is an interest in choosing...but a lot of people ask why do you translate into the language of the coloniser? But my point is that if you get the language of the coloniser to become the language of the colonised, then it does much more harm than just speaking in a different tongue.

MM: You have spoken about translation as a series of defensible gestures and corrective gestures. So, what is the most intimate gesture you have been tempted to make, and did you make it?

AS: Oh, this is hard to answer because translators tend to move on from the text part because we just finished a book and we moved on to the next one. Yeah, well, I had an interesting experience recently. I had translated a very difficult to translate, perhaps the most difficult book I had translated, titled Vabhnama, written by a Bangladeshi writer named Akhtaroo Zaman. And within Vabhnama there are a lot of lines from songs that are sung by a character who is dead now, his name is Chirag Ali. And Chirag Ali sings these songs and through them he passes on a lot of, you know, there is a mix of history and political commentary and so on.

And then there are his successors who also compose and sing songs in a similar manner. And translating easily to English was obviously more challenging than translating the prose itself. Because you always have to choose between the rhythm and music on the one hand, and the content on the other hand. I felt that the novel was such a politically charged novel that I chose content, I chose to programme content over the sound of the original song. It was a definite choice. But within that respect, I felt that I should simply point it out one way, perhaps a different path could have been taken. I asked Akhtaroo Zaman to put me on the translation of this. And when I saw that I felt, wow, I have such a good idea. So, that is the kind of thing that I might change in my career in another way.

MM: The global celebration of translated Indian literature often happens in very English-first spaces. So, does translation democratise literature or does it simply reorganise literary hierarchies according to you?

AS: Great question. I would say that it does a little bit of democratisation in the sense that it makes it now available to people who would normally not have read that particular text. But since we tend to associate democracy not just with expanding the pool of receivers but also making it very large. The whole point is democracy is a mass movement. You can't have democracy for the few. So, to that extent, you are right. It really reorganises categories and hierarchies much more. And unfortunately, our most read translations are those that win Western prizes. And therefore, they are not being read as translated because they are translated. They are being read because they won that prize. No one is actually making a virtue out of the fact that it is not the original language. They just say, won a Nobel Prize, let's read it or let's buy it. Then, if possible, let's read it. So, most certainly, most certainly, even long ago, in 1997 when Arundhati Roy won the Booker, I mean the book certainly made waves in India, but its numbers exploded after that.

MM: Finally, as someone who translates, teaches, mentors, and reflects critically on the act of translation, what do you hope young translators take away, not just about how to translate, but about why to translate at all?

AS: Actually I want them to take away only one thing, which is the feeling - oh, I love translating. That's all I want them to take away because there can be no greater motivation. The best things about art are when you teach yourself, not think what others teach you. You learn by watching what others are doing but then you teach yourself, you draw the conclusions and it is all informed by love, because the moment it becomes anything else like a chore or an assignment or a goal to be met then it becomes a problem. For example AI, I'm sure at some point AI is going to do a fairly good job of translating but what is a world in which you do not experience the joy of translation, right? So that is what I'm getting at, the love of translation, the very act of translation rather than finishing a book, getting it published- sheer love and joy that makes you forget yourself while you're translating. Just like acting or singing, when you forget you exist, its completely being in that moment. So that's what I want anyone interested in translation to feel, to be able to say that I love translation and therefore I want to translate.

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