

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS: POETRY AND TRANSLATION

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First Person Narrative Between Tongues

Amarjit Chandan

The British Library project, 'Between Two Worlds,' primarily – though not exclusively – interviews and records poets from diverse regions of the world now settled in England.¹ It asks what it means to be translated and what forces—from both their lost and host countries—they most value as influencing their work. Migration, exile, displacement, borders, culture shock, racism, marginality, alienation, loneliness, identity, citizenship, language and the issue of translation are some of the common themes that emerged from these interviews. Drawing from a number of interviews that I carried out for this project and from my own experiences as a poet who translates and is translated, I examine the three dominant issues of exile, language, and identity.

I

EXILE

'Exile is the end and never the beginning.'
Paul Tabori, 'Song of Exile'

The history of the world is a history of displacement and emigration. It has become one of the typical experiences of our times. Exile, as an 'enforced removal or absence from one's country' evokes the names of the great men of letters: Ovid, Dante, Machiavelli, Voltaire, Rousseau, Victor Hugo, Karl Marx and more recently Bertolt Brecht and Nazim Hikmet. It is a favourite theme of writers, artists and political activists. In the Indian collective unconscious, however, exile is followed by a return home. After spending fourteen years in exile with his wife and brother, the Hindu deity Rama returned home to a jubilant reception.² Undertaking long journeys in search of knowledge, Nanak, the first Sikh guru, left and returned home four times.

I never feel nostalgic about my past. It was hard, too hard. I am not here to uphold my family's honour or to seek salvation. I have no desire to go back. But the strange leader in the memory game takes me back and on the lane smashes me, like a character in a computer game. Again, I collect my bits and pieces and re-emerge and am again smashed. The cycle never ends.

George Gömöri (Hungarian) sees exile as a complex story in which there are three adaptable attitudes to displacement and/or, exile: to give up a previous identity; not to learn a new language; and to try to best manage with multiple identities, a compromise that he calls, 'controlled schizophrenia.' In 'A Kind of Ode to England', a poem written in

¹ Countries of origin include Chile, China, Hungary, India, Iran, Iraq, Kurdistan, Mexico, Pakistan, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine and Wales. Languages include Arabic, Bengali, Farsi, Hindi, Hungarian, Kurdish, Punjabi, Russian, Spanish, Urdu and Welsh.

² *Divali*, the annual festival of lights, is celebrated to mark his homecoming.

Hungarian, he articulates these complexities: '...I am a stranger / pregnant with otherness / ...you make me almost at home / though your guest only'; a pun on the Hungarian expression of being pregnant when a woman is in an altered state. According to him, a foreigner exists in the UK in an altered state. His uncanny prophecies in these poems written in the late 1950s came true, for example, '...at the end of the road I will get home'. He returned to Hungary in 1995 and was awarded the Commander's Cross Medal and the highest literary award, the *Pro Cultura Hungarica*.

Saadi Yousef (Arabic, Iraq) describes exile as a river or an undercurrent. Exile has always been part of Iraqi culture, and this is part of his journey too.

Esmail Khoi (Farsi, Iran), currently President of Iranian PEN-in-exile, is by choice not a British citizen, which causes problems when travelling abroad, but he loves his country and resists a 'double identity'. He says, however, that he feels like an honoured guest in this country.

Yuri Kolker (Russian). In 1984, Kolker was among the one thousand refuseniks who left Russia. He was not a Zionist and did not have any contact with Israel. He might have gone to Australia, the USA, Paris or Germany – but went to Israel 'through a sense of moral obligation to those refuseniks left behind'. Having no friends or relatives in Israel, he faced difficulties in settling down. 'Israel,' he says, "is a good country but not the best to live in'. Moreover, he thinks that his involvement in Russian literature prevented him from becoming a 'normal' Israeli citizen.

Satyendra Srivastava (Hindi, India) came to London in 1958 and subsequently worked in menial jobs while studying at SOAS for his PhD on Colonial Education Policy. He later taught Hindi in Cambridge University. He has kept his Indian passport, which is his identity. London changed and made his life, he says. His best friends are English. He belongs to both places—India and England. His poem, 'Sir Winston Churchill Knew My Mother' simmers with pacifist anger, and it sums up the history of British colonialism and the relationship of its former subjects with the mother country.

For **Roberto Rivera-Reyes** (Spanish, Chile), this country was the land of freedom and opportunities. He sought political asylum in England after General Pinochet took power in 1973. The meaning of the two letters UK is personal for Rivera-Reyes: 'this is the place I was born again. It took ten years to have openings. I travelled around extensively falling deeply in love with the country and its people. Roberto was rescued by Roberto.' He goes back to Chile but not too often. Now his heart is everywhere—in London, in Santiago, in any place you can name.

II

LANGUAGE & IDENTITY

What language am I doomed to die in?
 The Spanish my ancestors used...
 The English of that Bible
 my grandmother read from at the desert's edge?

Jorge Luis Borges, 'The Web'

The history of the unequal relationship between English and my mother language, Punjabi, goes back to the early 19th century, when William Carey, a shoemaker turned Baptist, published *A Grammar of Punjabi Language* in 1812 in Calcutta, then the capital of British India. In 1849, the East India Company's army occupied the sovereign state of the Punjab, the land of my ancestors. It came under the control of the British Crown government in 1858. Seven years earlier John Newton of the Ludhiana Christian Mission in Eastern Punjab had published the first-ever Punjabi translation of *The New Testament*. It was called *Anjeel* (after French – *évangile*) along with a new Grammar of the Punjabi Language. The three-pronged process of politics, religion and linguistics was in full swing, though the African formula of the Bible and the Land had not been charted exactly in India. The religious conversion was negligible but the linguistic transformation was enormous. The British left India in 1947 dismembering the Punjab, but English still rules there; so much so that the Punjabi syntax, now mirroring the English sentence structure, is changed forever.

With the steam rail engine came the colonial locomotive that was full of a new class of western-oriented Indian gentlemen, better known as *baboos*. Careerists—the offspring of Lord Macaulay's agenda of educating Indians to craft a nation of petty clerks—they soon learnt to take pride in attaining glibness in English. Lord Macaulay had said that 'a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India'. In that belief, Indian school children of future generations were made to cram Shakespeare's sonnet 'Let me not to the marriage of true minds...', Wordsworth's 'Daffodils' and Shelley's 'Ozymandias', ignoring their own linguistic and literary heritage. The loss was total. There was a blessing in disguise, however. Thanks to English, a window opened on the world of knowledge. The Punjabis studying abroad in the universities of Oxford, Cambridge, London, and California established contact and interaction with Western thought.

On this sundry background of gain and loss, I was made to learn English at the young age of six. But even today, when I have to speak it, first I think in Punjabi and then translate into English. While uttering English words, I always feel that something is being lost—it's not what I intended to say—though set situations learnt over the years don't pose any problem. When the reflex translating system breaks down and words are spoken which were not intended at all, then misunderstandings arise.

I started writing in Punjabi, which I had learnt simultaneously with English, at the age of 20. I cut my literary teeth in a real Punjabi milieu. My father, a carpenter turned photographer and communist trade unionist, wrote poetry as well. My mother was illiterate. So my home language remained unadulterated. I rarely write verse in English. The poems I have written were for my friends who did not know my language. When I translate such poems into Punjabi, I put the appendage sheepishly—'translated from English'. No wonder, working with English poets, I could translate only one fourth of my

original poems into English. Milan Kundera, in his novel *Testaments Betrayed*, sympathises and bemoans Leoš Janáček's determination to write his operas in Czech, thus limiting his audience. I feel that I am of his tribe. I think, feel and dream in Punjabi. My language is my real home, my last retreat. I experience it with all my senses; each word strikes a chord. Shapes, movements, and silence have a language too, and for me, though I have lived in an English-speaking world for so long, these things are comprehended through Punjabi.

Freud says that it is not possible to return to the womb. In another context, the poet John Berger talks about the myth of return. I still have associations with some Punjabi words, and the word *ma boli*, mother language, is very close to me. My poems bear witness that return is possible, though I would aver that this happens in imagination. There is a catch when I talk of language. Memories have been the recurrent theme in my poems. What are memories? The slow-motion images that are retrieved or come back in sonic codes. In other words, language—sonic codes—is memory. If I find my memories tormenting, how can I feel secure with my mother language?

In one of my poems I express the desire to go beyond language, to feel free and be silent forever. I know, though, that it is not easy and that there is no escape from memories, however hard one tries. I was mortified to realise one day that the English language in which my children converse with me, and the language from which I earn my bread and butter, remains so strange to me. Even after all these years. In my family line, Punjabi, the language of my ancestors, will be dead forever after me.

* * *

Choman Hardi (Kurdish) has four languages. She hardly spoke any English when she arrived in the UK as a young girl. She needed a cultural map. For the last few years she has thought and felt in English but is now reverting to Kurdish. 'While writing there is no overlapping of languages,' she says. She argues that Kurdish and English treat poetry differently and has yet to try translating her poems. She says that she does not recognise her own poems translated into English and sometimes feels that she is betraying the Kurdish language when she writes in English. All the poems in her book *Life for Us* were written in English. She feels comfortable that she is in a unique situation where she is telling her Kurdishness in a foreign tongue. She hopes, however, that not all Kurds will write in English, for that would be the end of her language.

Kapka Kassabova (Bulgarian), who now writes in English, finds difficulty in understanding the Essex glottal stop and says that once something is translated, it becomes something else. She sees tension between faithfulness and creativity. To her translation is almost as exciting as writing; she has translated Bulgarian short fiction into English. 'People usually think I'm Israeli, South African or French,' she says. The truth is she is a 'Bulgarian Kiwi', which nobody believes. She thinks this is the age for people like her. And perhaps there is some truth in this, for as people continue to travel and settle elsewhere, more and more people like Kassabova are emerging on the scene, with multiple allegiances, cultural and linguistic.

Roberto Rivera-Reyes (Chilean) thinks, feels, and dreams bilingually in Spanish and English but not in that order. He has written quite a few poems in English and does not see it as a betrayal to his mother tongue.

III

TRANSLATION, TRANSFORMATION

'Everything we do is translation.'
Octavio Paz

Etymologically, the word 'translate' originated in the eighth century and means: 1) remove from one place to another; 2) turn from one language to another.

For translation the Punjabi word in my language originated from Sanskrit is: Anuvād. Anu+Vād. Anu = Pichhey-Pichhey ਿੱਛੇ-ਿੱਛੇ Which Follows, Nālo-nāl ਨਾਲੇ-ਨਾਲ, NeRhey-NeRhey ਨੇੜੇ-ਨੇੜੇ -close, near, side by side, corresponding at the same time. The closeness is signified by the hyphen between the same words repeated twice literally with emphasis, i.e. following-following, near-near, with-with. Vād ਵਾਦ – Bāt ਬਾਤ is an idea behind a sound/word. So the compound word *anuvād* for translation means an idea, which has been followed closely. The poetic creative process can be defined in so many ways. Maybe the idea underlying the word *anuvād* equally applies to the birth of a poem.

The answer to the age-old question – is it really possible to translate poetry? – is, to my mind, both yes and no. But what is it that translation brings out and what is it that is lost or not communicated? These basic questions will continue to be asked without any definitive answers. People, of course, have come to know other people through translation. Pushkin called translators the 'couriers or carthorses of literature'; Susan Sontag saw translation as 'a passport within the community of literature'. It is the bridge connecting languages across continents. With the bridge comes the metaphor of the sky or the river; that is what language is.

There is a certain element of truth in the cliché that it is impossible to translate poetry; that poetry is what is lost in translation, as Frost would have it. Every language is a planet in itself, each word having its own world. Amongst many a definition of poetry, Coleridge's is the most apt perhaps: 'the best possible words in the best possible order'. Paz saw poetry as 'language in a state of savage purity'. The whole question is how to get the order and the savage purity across in another language.

Douglas Dunn, Scottish poet, introducing Alastair Reid's collection *Inside Out* (2008) quotes Willis Barnstone, American poet and translator, from his book *The Poetics of Translation* (1993): 'Because there are no perfect equivalents between languages or even within the same language...perfection in translation is inconceivable.'

The first losses of translation are those of the sound and script of the original language, which I call the mother script. This can be explained with the help of the metaphor of the body. If the script is the body, the abode of its soul its poetic essence, then the soul leaves it reincarnating in another body of another script which is its new home. No word, which is basically a sound, a sonic code, can be replaced by another word and code, especially in another language. Though it all happens between the languages and scripts, it exists in the realm of language. In this paradoxical situation, translation is not possible

Bhartrhari, the Sanskrit linguist of 5-6 century AD coined a term, *akhand sphota* – undivided intuitive perception of the whole meaning – the word *shabda* and meaning

sphota being identical and sound being its ephemeral aspect. According to Patanjli, the Sanskrit linguist of 4th century BC, the meaning is word's permanent aspect. One can imagine the breakdown of the non-duality of the original word and meaning in the translation process and its possible transference in another language. Again it is an impossible situation.

What else is lost? Grammar, gender specific nouns unlike English (all male, female, no neutral), ethos, nuances, tone, rhythm, metre, context, perspective, sense of humour, folklore, six senses – sights, sounds, smells, textures, tastes, and the inner nature of things – the end result of poetry.

Joseph Brodsky famously said, 'Poetry is what is gained in translation'. Daniel Weissbort, poet and translator, says: 'The opportunity translation offers to explore one's own literary resources is possibly the greatest immediate gain of its practice.'

The most important thing is to convey the elegance of thought of the original poem in its essence, 'what makes a poem a poem' (George Gömöri) keeping its otherness intact in translation.

Literary translation has now acquired an academic status worldwide and there are a plethora of studies on the art of translation. Every translator would have a story to tell of his own experience. Nevertheless hardly any single theory of translation exists.

Susan Sontag in her 2002 WG Sebald memorial lecture, 'The World as India', cites three main authentic though conflicting reflections on the task of translation by St Jerome (331-420) the translator of the Hebrew Bible into Latin, German Protestant theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1778-1834) and the German Jewish Marxist Walter Benjamin (1892-1940).

The whole debate on translation revolves around their insights pertaining to two opposite views and a possible middle ground.

St Jerome, the first intellectual from the ancient world to write on the subject, called literal translation absurd, 'partly discharging the office of a translator and partly that of a writer', a practice that sacrifices meaning and of grace. Taking the opposite position, Schleiermacher argued in his essay 'On Different Methods of Translation' (1813) that it was the primary duty of the literary translator to stay as close as possible to the original text. It should not be naturalised and the spirit of the original, its foreignness, and its otherness should remain intact.

In his essay, 'The Task of the Translator'³ (1923), Benjamin tells that he is not obliged to make Baudelaire sound as if he had written in German and he maintained that the translator ought to allow 'his language to be powerfully affected by the foreign tongue'.

Both Schleiermacher and Benjamin talk of language in terms of religiosity, elevating translation to the level of the sublime. They talk of sacred seriousness, purity, divinity and the messianic end of history. Such mystical ideas make it less likely to propound any single theory of translation.

³ A preface to his translation of Baudelaire's *Tabeleaux parisiens* (Parisian Scenes) extracted from *Les Fleurs du Mal* (Flowers of Evil, 1857)

Perhaps a poet undertakes the task of translating poetry in a more authoritative way, as he is better equipped with the art of writing. Several English poets in our times have tried with marvellous results, including Ezra Pound, WH Auden, Stephen Spender, Ted Hughes, and Seamus Heaney.

TS Eliot, introducing Ezra Pound's *Selected Poems* (1928) saw him as 'the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time' and termed his translations of Chinese poems of Li Po in *Cathay* (1915) as 'translucencies', the test of excellence, a "'magnificent specimen of XXth century poetry", rather than a translation'.

The poet Alistair Reid is a respected translator of Borges and Neruda. The latter's advice given to him is oft quoted: 'Don't just translate my poems – I want you to improve them.' In translation, he says, contrary to Schleiermacher and Benjamin, he prefers to be 'unfaithful to be loyal': 'your obligation is to ensure that something that goes off wonderfully well in the original works just as well in English. The main thing is to make it sound like an English poem. If you can make the thrill of the original come across in translation, you've succeeded. Only bad translators insist on utter faithfulness.'⁴ Reid says poems have an essence that hovers above and beyond language and which, with luck, can be kept alive. He quotes Neruda: 'in the net it's not just the strings that count/ but also the air that escapes through the meshes.' (*Inside Out*. Polygon. 2008).

Further questions arise: How a poem can be improved in translation? Why one would do it in the first place? What are the ways in which a translator can remain faithful to the text and not to the words? Also, where is the line, which is drawn between the idea and the body of a poem? Samuel Beckett was bi-lingual. It would be worth knowing how he managed and how much poetic licence he took in translating his own work from French into English and vice versa?

Writing and translating poetry is a mysterious process and some poets, including Reid, who are well versed with both the pursuits, have written poems about it. Paz observed: 'In writing an original poem, we are translating the word. Everything we do is translation.' Taking a cue perhaps from this idea, Reid, in his bi-lingual English and Spanish poem, 'What Gets Lost', echoes Robert Frost's lines: '...the problem is not a question/what gets lost in translation/...but more what gets lost in language itself.' This leads us to Sontag's insight: 'Every language is part of Language, which is larger than any single language.'

I turn now to my personal experience.

During the last twenty years I worked on an English translation of my poems 'in tandem' with my English poet friends, John Welch, Julia Casterton, Stephen Watts and Yvonne Green.

I always do the first draft and later work on each word with my friends, including punctuation and arrangement of lines. I was doing double duty and writing the poem twice, as Daniel Weissbort said about Joseph Brodsky translating his own poetry. One of the friends went further. Making it a more painstaking task, she transliterated the poems without knowing the language. She was not interested in my first drafts.

⁴ Interview with Alistair Reid by James Campbell *The Guardian*, 20 September 2008

Using poetic licence I tend to take some liberty with my poems and use language or imagery that is not in the original. When my above-mentioned collaborator sent me her Englished version of my poem, I was unable to relate to it.

I think in my case I was asserting my right of moral ownership and what the translator was trying to do was intellectual appropriation. It did not work and a compromise was never tried.

Thankfully, there can't be any breakdown of working relationship with the classical poets, whose work is more difficult to do (e.g. the great Punjabis – Nanak, the Sufis, Wāris Shāh et al.). They are not there to object and the translators are always left with full freedom but with much greater responsibility.

Modern Punjabi poetry is easier to translate as it is influenced by English and western poetry. The language's poetics have changed now, and its imagery, syntax, diction have become simplified.

When I translate my rare English poems into Punjabi, saying sheepishly, '*Translated from the original in English*', I again take some liberty. I don't think anybody else could do full justice in Punjabi as I do, as in both the situations I am in control. Being the author, I know the source of each word, image and metaphor and the whole creative process that led to these particular words on a page.

I must admit that it has taken me all these years to translate just one fifth of my work – about 120 poems. The rest is simply not possible. I find my essays in Punjabi much more demanding to translate and so far, I haven't dared to touch any of those.

For me Punjabi's every sound is a tangible form and English does not work the same way in me. And this despite the fact that my poetic training was equally influenced by Western modern poetry: Brecht, Ritsos, Neruda, Hikmet, Cardenal et al. I read in English translation. I have translated their poetry into Punjabi without much difficulty, but if I were to translate my favourite contemporary English poets like Dannie Abse, Jackie Kay, Adrian Mitchell and Owen Sheers, I would find it really challenging.

Most of the time the real worth of a poem is put to test when it is translated into another language. Auden said: 'I love Italian, it's the most beautiful language to write in, but terribly hard for writers, because you can't tell when you've written nonsense. In English you know right away.'

I do know that Punjabi in that sense is not much different from Italian. I am always able to filter out the nonsense from my poems. Like the Qura'nic angel Nakeer, the English-speaking secular angel Auden is always perched on my right shoulder taking notes of my deeds.

Problems of grammar, diction and idiom will remain forever; that's what translating is all about. Here is a simple sentence – **I love you**. English glosses of the Punjabi sentence will be: **I you to loving am**. It may give some idea how the Punjabi mind works through the language and vice versa.

The idea in the original is the soul, which after translation incarnates itself in a new body. It is like transplanting a sapling to a new soil and controlled atmosphere. It takes a while to take roots.

The whole translating pursuit is only liberating after it has been accomplished. It is said a poem is never complete. I'd say, it's more so when it is translated.

* * *

A REAL POEM DEFIES TRANSLATION

Sudeep Sen, who writes both in Bengali and English with equal command, wrote a poem in English on the translating process.⁵ Its last line is an aphorism: A real poem defies translation, in every way.

TRANSLATING POETRY

for Amarjit Chandan

Your poem translated itself so many times:
from the incipient thoughts that brewed
in your mind, as your *ma boli* mother language fumed
straining to come together, trying

to emerge from shapelessness
to a semblance of shape. Re-piecing
together the shattered mirror, remoulding
and reflecting light from unknown niches,

the poem switched tongue and its skin
as the oblique image stamped its imprint.

But the translation wasn't quite done:
it was fed into a computer
to be processed, polished further,
and parts re-written, then fed again. One

strange beast of an electronic transmission
ate the poem again, the fodder waxed
and its shape reshaped. Then out of my fax
at night, a sheet of glazed emission

emerged, words on an unsuspecting tray:
A real poem defies translation, in every way.

31 July 1994

⁵ *Dali's Twisted Hands* (1995) and *Aria* (Yeti Books, India 2009 and Mulfran Press, Wales, 2010).

RECORDED POETS' VIEWS ON TRANSLATING POETRY

George Gömöri, the Hungarian poet, translator and Cambridge don, does not agree with the statement that poetry is what is lost in translation: 'to mirror the original form and content is impossible; the translator always recreates the original; 70-80 per cent of the original can be rescued. It's a different case with different languages; some do well in other languages, some do not. There always will be a kind of residue of untranslatable text. Wordsworth does not come up very well in Hungarian, but Shakespeare does and Byron too; Nazim Hikmet in Hungarian is 'rubbish', Neruda much better; Brecht partly; language affinities are certainly true. Shakespeare in Hungarian is better than in French. I as a child detested German, but later realised that it was a personal loss not to read Goethe, Heine etc. in original. I had to learn Russian for four years in school; I took to the "beautiful" Russian language after seeing a play in Warsaw in 1953. It depends who speaks it and when. I translated some Russian poems including Pasternak's (published in Hungarian in Washington DC)'.

Mimi Khalvati, poet, translator and poetry tutor agrees with Gömöri. She is a great proponent for the translating of poetry. Without translation, she says, we would be imprisoned within our own cultures, without any access or insight into the poetry of other cultures. To say that translation is impossible is not helpful. A translator is constantly grappling with the complexities of the process. A translated poem is a new event; a new poem in itself. She has translated one or two poems from Farsi into English and has worked with Hardi on Kurdish poems translating them into English— 'a fascinating and difficult experience'.

Moniza Alvi, poet and poetry tutor, has translated the French poet, Jules Supervielle, into English and found the job extremely difficult. The thought in them is simple, child-like and sophisticated. Though she had things in common with him – he was also born elsewhere; was separated from his mother at an early age, some of his poems were, she says, beyond her. Many of the lines came quite quickly, but there were always a few lines that were very tough and would take her a couple of years to get right. She does not append her translations with *Translated from French*, but writes, instead, *After Jules Supervielle*. They are, she says, loose versions and not faithful translations.

Alvi thinks that there is enormous gain to be got in translation. She cannot imagine reading poetry written only in English. Without translation many people would not have access to many poets of the world.

Choman Hardi says that sound, rhythm and structure are lost in translation, especially so with formal poetry. Sometimes, its meaning too is lost. There are also different poetic licenses in different languages. In Kurdish you can be quite abstract and surreal, but in English it shall sound 'flowery'. In Kurdish, you can get away with four or five adjectives in a single sentence. It is a tricky business whether to be loyal to the original text or to take liberties, and if so, how many. Translators struggle with such issues all the time. She finds that poetry in European languages, which relies on understatement and subtlety, can be easier to translate compared to Eastern languages.

She herself has translated two Kurdish poets, Dilawar Karadakhi and Sherko Bekas. 'Karadakhi works well in English. His poem has many images, which are easily translated into English. Bekas is into the sounds. He is elaborate, lyrical and passionate. I'm not

satisfied with his translations. Kurdish and English languages treat poetry very differently. I don't recognise my own poems translated into English.'

Liu Hongbin works in collaboration with translators who do not necessarily know the Chinese language. He supplies a first literal rendition and then works closely with translators towards a final version.

Ravil Bukharev uses this metaphor for poetry in translation: the two sides of a precious brightly coloured carpet, where the reverse side has same pattern but no brightness or colour. He is not satisfied with his English language poetry. The four languages in which he expresses himself all work differently. 'Everyone wants to be inside, not outside', he says. 'The only way in is through language but still you remain an "orphan", your mentality is already engraved in you. People don't understand this. They think that if you speak the same language as they do you are, or should be, one of them.' In London, Bukharev struggles with German but the language comes straight back to him when he visits Germany, where 'even the trees speak German'. When he sits down to write it is the language, he says, which chooses him, not vice versa.

Roberto Rivera-Reyes thinks that the structure of a poem cannot be transported into in to another language. In Spanish it is an animal and in English it is a bird. He agrees with the term 'transplantation' in reference to the translating process and argues that a poet is never completely happy with a translation.

Satyendra Srivastava: The reason he gives for not translating two lines with strong sexual overtones into English from the original Hindi in 'Bob Shillington Plays Cricket Alone' was for reasons of 'etiquette and respect for the English language'.

Yuri Kolker doesn't believe poetry can be translated. He feels unable to write in English but has nothing to say to British people, as all his references are Russian: 'Coleridge for example is untranslatable. Russian prosody and English prosody have very little in common. In poetry you cannot separate the "what" from the "how"'. Talking about the seven concepts of poetry, he says, translators in effect write their own poetry based on the original. Although he acknowledges that some of his own translations have met with great success.

Saqi Farooqi feels that the composition of poems in English brings a kind of freshness to his work; thinking in Urdu and writing in English, and vice-versa. He never translates his own poems because, he says, he ends up writing a completely different poem. He is very happy with the translations of his work by Frances Pritchett and by Mahmood Jamal, but 'in poetry, you translate everything except poetry. In translation, music dies. It is important though to understand the thought process of other peoples and through translation a new world opens up for the reader'.

RECORDED DELIVERY

'The ear is the best reader.'
Robert Frost

When poets read their own words we are aware of more than the words: we take in how they breath, what their posture is (sitting, standing in private, public or studio setting), how they recite, what their accents, tone, smile, sigh, laughter and even stammers are.

The arrangement of words, the integrity of the line, and the shape supporting the feeling of the poem come alive in a voice recording.

Faiz, the great Urdu poet, was a good example that all poets are not necessarily good readers.

'A lot of performance poetry does not stand up on the page.' (Kapka Kassabova)

Imtiaz Dharker says Scots and Punjabi are very similar. There is strength and directness in the two languages. These are 'the languages of bony hips'; 'kind of buffalo languages'. She spells God with a small 'g' and asserts that a listener would know that it is like that – what comes through in the poem from the tone.

Saqi Farooqi's daughter does not know Urdu. He hopes in years to come her grandchildren might want to find out about their grandfather and may come to the British Library to listen to his recording.

SOURCES

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