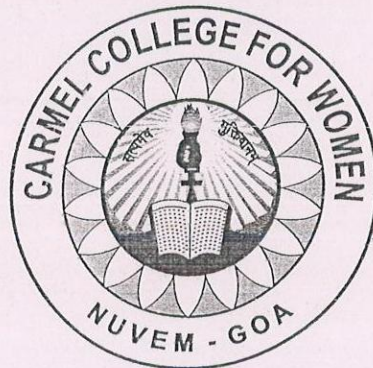


Kruti / कृति

A Peer-Reviewed Multidisciplinary Research Journal



**CARMEL COLLEGE OF
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Translation through Transcreation: A Study of Hema Naik's *Bhogdand* in English Translation

Glenis Mendonça*

Abstract

Most Konkani fiction in English translation which has been studied with some degree of critical insight mainly comprises of novels and short stories written by men. However, it is essential to note that quite a few women writers have created a mark through their novels and short stories. Among them, Hema Naik's short stories and novels constitute a sizeable segment of women writing in Konkani. In particular, her work *Bhogdand* is a significant contribution to the Konkani Novel written by women writers and hence deserves concerted attention. Interestingly, it is not a well known fact that the novel began its literary genesis as a Konkani radio play with an English title "The Account May Be Closed..."

The present paper seeks to highlight the role of transcreation with special reference to the English translation of Hema Naik's *Bhogdand* by Prakash Thali, which was serialised in the Sunday edition of *The Navhind Times*, "Panorama" from 7 February to 14 November, 1999. The paper also seeks to explain the term 'transcreation' and show how the text under study demonstrates a creative 'rendering' of a real-life experience firstly as a radio-play, then a 're-rendering' as a novel and finally as a translation into English which was serialised with segmentation with individual titles and graphic visuals. The importance to critically study texts written by Konkani women writers in the original or in translation will be highlighted. The need of the hour is to give recognition to the muffled voices of Konkani women writers and bring them to the centre of critical study.

Konkani fiction written in the *Devnagri* script is primarily speaking a man's world, where the voice of the woman through writing is muffled. Short story writers like Sheela Kolambkar, Jyoti Kunkolienkar, Jaimala Danait, Hema Naik, Meena Kakodkar, Jayani Naik and a few others have given enormous portrayals into the woman's world through their fictional writings. However, where the genre of novel is concerned, it is a male-centred domain, with just a few novels and novellas written by women writers. Among those that have been translated into English, almost all writers are male. The voice of a Konkani woman novelist through translation makes a very big difference to the fabric of Konkani fiction. It transports the body of literature which was hitherto unknown to a realm where it is read and appreciated across geographical boundaries. Through such writings, women-centric issues and feminine sensibility acquires recognition and obtains a space for self-expression.

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The present paper aims to highlight the noteworthy contribution made by Hema Naik to the arena of Konkani novel in English translation through her first novel in English translation, *Bhogdand* translated with the same title by Prakash Thali. Though many writers, translators and critics claim that Pundalik Naik's *Acchev* (1977) translated as *The Upheaval* (2002) by Vidya Pai is the first Konkani novel in English translation, the present researcher has a different view. The English translation of Hema Naik's *Bhogdand* serialised and published in the Sunday issues of Navhind Times - Panorama, from February to December 1999, is the first Konkani novel in Devnagri script to be translated into English. However, the fact that it was not published as an entire book made this translation almost a non-entity. It was inaccessible as a complete text and hence was not acknowledged till it was uncovered from the Goa Central Library newspaper archives for the purpose of this study.

Hema Naik and *Bhogdand*

Hema Naik is a familiar and significant name in the realm of Konkani literature. She is a fiction writer, translator, essayist, critic, publisher and editor--- all rolled into one. A multi-faceted personality, she has five published books to her credit, out of which two are novels: *Nirballa Ani Mukti* (1992) and *Bhogdand* (1997). Dr. Manohar Rai SarDessai in his *A History of Konkani Literature* (2000) writes:

The principal theme of Hema's stories is the woman and woman alone. This limits the scope of her stories but also gives them a unity. She is more interested in characterization than in plot. Hema's style...is too simple, too straight forward, too sober to lend bright colours to certain situations, to heighten tensions. Her militant spirit against unjust, irrational and stultifying social convention is well seen in her stories...(201)

Many critics and readers called Hema Naik a feminist writer soon after her novel *Nirballa Ani Mukti* was published. In an elaborate article she wrote in the *Jaag* (Diwali-Naatal 2011) issue, entitled "Bhog+Dand=*Bhogdand* Kadambare Fatli Katha" Hema Naik pours out all her sentiments and anguish about being a woman writer who challenges social norms through her powerful writings. She even discloses how her experiences from 1974 when she worked as a bank employee gave her inspiration to sow the seed of her plot for her stories and novel *Bhogdand*. The plot of this novel is drawn from an episode she encountered at her workplace in the seventies. A customer walks up to her counter and insists on making a withdrawal even when his balance is just Rs.5. On being taken to the bank manager, he discloses his tragic life-saga. His mother had insisted that he go to Kuwait to improve his prospects. There this man worked as a cook and sent money back home. He got married and went back to Kuwait little knowing that he was on the path of being made into a veritable cuckold. Not only did his wife squander his money on building a lavish house for herself, but also had a relationship going on with an old boyfriend. The man felt so terribly cheated and shocked that all his hard earned money was squandered and his trust

betrayed. But he was most horrified when his wife told him to work as a cook in their own house in Goa, while she continued her life with her paramour.

Hema used this episode to weave a 'nabhonatya' or radio-play with an English title "The Account May Be Closed" which was performed and then transcreated the same to write her novel *Bhogdand*. Believing firmly that fiction should portray a slice of real and lived experience, her fictification and re-rendering of a real lived experience only proves that Konkani women novelists use the kernel of plot from real life and fuse it to weave a beautiful tapestry of fiction, with a deeper sensitivity towards the female protagonists.

Thematic fabric of Hema Naik's *Bhogdand*

The novel is set in the island Sant Estevam or 'zuevar', and narrates the tale of a wayward youth Leslie, who lives a life of poverty with his widowed mother, after having lost his father (a electricity department linesman) in a freak accidental electrocution. Unable to make ends meet, Leslie is prodded by his mother Antonette to seek a job in Kuwait as a cook and house-help to bring in the required wealth back home. Taking help from his father's friend Newton, Leslie makes a fortune in Kuwait and Antonette is suddenly wallowing in riches bidding goodbye to her penury.

Leslie enters into an arranged marriage with Gemma, a poor girl who was completing her graduation in a city college. Gemma, who desires to complete her studies is reluctant at first, but later obliges to get away from her sordid poverty which afflicts her back at home. However, she continues her physical relationship with her classmate and sweetheart Robin while barely managing a Platonic relationship with Leslie who returns back to Kuwait for work. Gemma uses her husband's money to build a separate house away from the 'zuvo', abandons her cantankerous mother-in-law, and blissfully has extra-marital relations with Robin.

The Gulf war affects Leslie and he is compelled to return home, only to be shocked to know how unfaithful his Gemma has been. He resigns to his fate and is flabbergasted to hear that his wife wants him to serve as a cook in his own house. The end is suffused with pathos; Leslie hears the news of his mother's demise and sings a poignant song of a failed lover who faces betrayal and loss, heightened by the "Hai! Cota!" exclamation by Moren *titiu*.

The focal themes in *Bhogdand* include marriage and relationships, Platonic love vis-à-vis libidinal love, education and women's empowerment (feminist themes) and marital trust and betrayal. The feminist streak in Hema's writing is noticeable. This novel seems to be a gender-reversal of Damodar Mauzo's *Karmelin*, where the context in both is Kuwait and the transformation brought in by Gulf money, but also covertly showcases the moral bankruptcy ushered in by the petro-dinars. *Karmelin* and Leslie are both victims of circumstances; though in the former case the author is a male portraying a woman as a victim, while in the latter Hema turns the tables in favour of the woman. She shows how a

woman needs more than just money to live; she yearns for companionship, a soul-mate to relate physically and socially, carving an empowered identity for herself. Gemma through her education, brilliance and 'dare-to-be different' avant-garde ways, challenges traditional roles of a 'married woman' by breaking all shackles and lives on her own terms using her husband's wealth. Through such a character portrayal, Hema manages to blur the differences of masculinity and femininity through a self-created empowering identity created through her female protagonist. There is an implicit suggestion that such an empowerment is possible only with higher education and exposure. Though such a depiction may shock the complacent readers and make the actions of Gemma seem shameful, yet through the lens of realism it is possible to view this as feminine psyche in search for a complete relationship which is met through Robin, not Leslie. As Gemma confesses: "I have not married Leslie. I have married his money. Matrimony is after all a matter of money." (NT, *Panorama*, Sept 5, 1999). Using Leslie's money, she punishes him for leaving her in utter solitude with his mother, by satiating her physical and psychological needs with Robin. Thus emerges the title, *Bhog* (satiety) and *dand* (punishment), a unique coinage which knits these elements together.

Understanding Transcreation

The word 'translation' in the Indian context has multiple shades of meanings, unlike in the Western view. The Sanskrit word 'anuvaad'(speaking after), the Arabic idea of 'tarjuma'(to explicate), the Hindi word 'bhashantar', the Bangla idea of 'roopantar' or 'vivartanam' in Malayalam are attempts to add various dimensions to the semantic understanding of 'translation'. And even after these attempts, the concept still remains undefined with precision. Sujit Mukherjee in his *Translation As Recovery* (2009) mentions Purshottam Lal's use of the term 'transcreation' or 'anusrjan' which tries to capture the complexity of translation in India, a word which existed half a century ago, but has recently been accepted in the *Advanced Learners Dictionary* (see Mukherjee 45), which defines it 'as an uncountable noun standing for creative translation seen as producing a new version of the original work' (43). Mukherjee asserts: "That we don't have a widely accepted Indian word for 'translation' suggests that the concept itself was not familiar to us. Instead, when we admired a literary text in one language, we used it as a take-off point and composed a similar text in another language"(45). Hence, in the name of translation, transcreation was undertaken, quite unobtrusively.

Hema Naik's *Bhogdand*: Translation through Transcreation

The translation of Hema Naik's *Bhogdand* by Prakash Thali, is indeed a creative rendering of a novel in segments/serials which appeared every Sunday on the coloured pages of the *Navhind Times, Panorama*. Beginning in February 1999, it was featured consistently on page-5 and was faithfully appearing to satisfy the avid readers of Konkani fiction in English translation till 14th November, 1999. All the 21 chapters were faithfully translated and published on the Sunday issues. What was most appealing was the fact that

every serial/piece seemed like an individual story with its own unique title and most often a graphic pictographic depiction. This made the rendering a creative enterprise, something more than mere translation; a translation through transcreation.

Bhogdand in translation had its unique features: it was a fair attempt to bring a Konkani novel into English for the very first time and get the average English reader familiar to a new arena of Konkani fiction in English translation. It brought a fresh perspective to give a voice and recognition to a Konkani woman novelist in English translation. However, there were also challenging circumstances for readers to follow the continued story Sunday after Sunday. Most often than not, readers lost interest along the way and aborted the idea of reading, considering the exercise to be mentally taxing as they had to recall the episode of the previous week to follow the plot. There were other cultural problems: since the novel dealt with a Roman Catholic culture, it was imperative to use appropriate equivalents to suit the source culture. The translator, who was not very familiar with the Source culture, made a fair attempt to translate; but however failed at specific junctures. Here are a few examples of inaccurate equivalents used by the translator in the Target language:

| Sr. No. | Word in Source Text (ST) | Word in Target Text (TT) | The suggested apt equivalent |
|---------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. | <i>Saibin Mai</i> | Goddess Mary | Mother Mary. |
| 2. | <i>Igorjent vachpacheo Tin chitti</i> | Three letters to be read in church | Wedding/pre-nuptial banns. |
| 3. | <i>Dennem</i> | A suitcase with articles | Bridal trousseau. |
| 4. | <i>Māscott</i> | A gold chain <i>mascot</i> | A gold bracelet |
| 5. | <i>Pau bazpachi Honna</i> | Bread-frying furnaces | traditional baker-ovens |

From the above examples, it is evident that the translation has lacked in what Nida calls 'dynamic equivalence' due to the fact that the culture-specific words are translated quite crudely, when a little reading, inquiry and investigation could have added dynamism to the translation. The use of the word 'Goddess' for 'Saibin' is absolutely jarring to a reader as this leads a reader off-track and makes the cultural/religious connotation quite obtuse. Hema Naik has taken pain to acquaint herself with Roman Catholic prayers like "Our Father" or the Nuptial vows uttered by the couple during mass. The accuracy of quoting these finer cultural nuances, religious texts and prayers of a culture she herself is not a part

of, is worthy of admiration. The translation, however fails to carry the cultural context across to the TL readers, though the possibility to do so was bright. The translator could however get a ready translation of the same from any person acquainted with the target culture, as translations of the prayers/vows are readily available. Incidentally, the translator has chosen to translate them on his own accord, little realising that these are sacred liturgical prayers.

There are several critics who show how the gender of the translator is significant to determine the tone and quality of translation more specifically if the text is rooted in a totally alien culture. Malashri Lal in her essay "Literary Feminism in India" mentions Sherry Simon's *Gender in Translation* 'wherein this matter is has been addressed...as to how the translator's gender bias often determines the word and tone of the end product' (Padia 79). In the present translation, the author is a woman and the translator, a man--- both unconnected to the Roman Catholic culture portrayed in the text. Known to be meticulous to fine details of culture and the woman-centric world, the author Hema Naik has been realistic and authentic in her portrayal of characters in the ST, but the translation suffers from lacunae as it lacks precise cultural equivalents, sensitivity towards culture/religious aspects and the Nidean Dynamic Equivalence.

Views of the author

A candid tête-e-tête with Hema Naik confirmed the following findings:

- The novel *Bhogdand* is a transcreation rather than an original creative work. It was written first as a radio-play and then rendered into a Konkani novel. Further, it was rendered into an English serialised translation on Sunday issues of a local daily. The novel as a genre, in this context undergoes a change from the ST to the TT. Both physically and structurally, the tale gets enriched in the serialised translation with the use of an individual title to every serialised episode along with pictographic depictions.
- The novel is the first Konkani novel in Devnagri script to be translated, but is not considered the first as it is not published in book-form.
- The translator had not shown the translation to the author prior to publication. Hence, typo-errors, cultural gaps, literal translation from the ST to TT are quite noticeable.
- Feminism through literature being Hema Naik's forte, the novel portrays the prime female character (Gemma) who displays streaks of radical feminism. The author admits that she addresses the cause for women's empowerment through the feminist discourse via such a portrayal.
- The novel *Bhogdand* which received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2002, is on the path towards being translated into four languages (including English) with the

support of Sahitya Akademi. The translation by Prakash Thali remains frozen in the newspaper-archives due to copyrights issues arising from the death of the translator.

Conclusion

The novel *Bhogdand* is a creative re-rendering or transcreation of the 'nabhonatya' "The Account May Be Closed" into a novel. The translation by Prakash Thali, though inaccessible to an average reader, is a brilliant attempt to bring fiction to the lovers of Konkani literature in English translation in a creative form. The serialised Sunday publication has been regular and fairly innovative, though it has obvious cultural and semantic gaps waiting to be filled. Each serialized publication reads like a short story with an individual title which makes the rendering more like a transcreation, than a mere translation. Most Konkani fiction is written by male authors and there is a need to uncover the hidden talent of Konkani women writers. There is an ardent need to study Konkani texts written by women, both as original and as works in translation. The voice of Konkani women writers will then be made more audible, for this writing is unique and touches a cord of sensitivity giving attention to a lesser-known side of Konkani literature. There is a lot of literature in this regard waiting to be explored and critically studied. Research scholars and Konkani enthusiasts should brace themselves up to undertake this daunting task to study women's writing and translation from and into Konkani so that Konkani women's writing will reach greater heights.

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