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Translating violence in India: Literary representations and the cartography of gender-based violence

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Abstract: This article examines the challenges of translating gender-based violence (GBV), focusing on English translations of select Hindi fiction depicting 'honour' killing—a specific form of GBV. Situated at the intersection of caste, gender, and sexual violence, these texts challenge societal structures and often remain non-canonical or controversial. As markers of violence, they present significant linguistic, cultural, and ethical challenges for translators. Honour killing narratives, often classified as 'problem texts,' expose the faultlines of the socio-cultural framework in which they are set. Consequently, translating such texts involves negotiating not only linguistic complexities but also cultural sensitivities and ethical responsibilities. This article adopts a methodological focus on translating key passages from two long short stories in Hindi: *Tiriya Charittar* ([1987]2010) by Shivmurti and *Daag Diya Sach* (2012) by Ramnika Gupta. These passages, central to the narratives, require careful translation strategies to address issues such as non-standard registers, oral traditions, graphic depictions of violence, and linguistic assertions of identity. By problematizing these challenges, the article explores strategies for rendering the socio-cultural complexities embedded in the source texts, particularly the tension between rural linguistic specificities and the demands of the target language. Through textual and contextual analysis, it foregrounds the ethical imperatives of translating GBV and honour killing narratives. Ultimately, it argues for the necessity of making such literary works available in English and across Indian languages, not just to introduce 'new' knowledge but to contribute to broader discussions on gender, caste, sexuality, and marginality in contemporary India.

Keywords: gender-based violence; honour killings; translation ethics; Hindi-English literary translation.

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1. Introduction

Translating gender-based violence (GBV)—specifically 'honour' killing in this article—into English raises several critical questions: What constitutes honour killing, and how is it related to GBV? How is it represented in Hindi literature, and what do these texts signify? Why should they be translated, and into which language—English or another Indian language? Who undertakes these translations, and for whom? Does translating texts about honour killing differ from translating other forms of literature? While not exhaustive, these questions highlight the key textual and contextual challenges a translator faces when working with narratives on honour killing. They point to the complexities of representation, language choice, and ethical responsibility inherent in translating such texts.

As a translator of GBV into English, I argue that alternative Hindi writings: *Tiriya Charittar*: The Character of Woman (Shivmurti, 2010) and *Daag Diya Sach*: The Funeral of Truth (Ramnika Gupta, 2012) serve as powerful lenses through which the socio-cultural problem of honor' killing could be comprehended and decoded. Both Ramnika Gupta and Shivmurti display key features of alternative Hindi literature: a lifelong commitment to representing marginalized voices, an unwavering critique of structural inequalities pertaining to caste, class and gender. In a nutshell, both these writers deviate from mainstream literary and seek to disrupt hegemonic social narratives prevalent in Hindi. Their literary works showcase a strong consciousness to open up crucial dialogues on caste, class, and gender. Shivmurti and Gupta, then, it would be safe to argue, enrich Hindi literature with a more inclusive and socially relevant perspective. Hence, alternative Hindi writings is a unique site that plays out the real complexity and bafflement of the problem of honor killing. My rationale for this focus on literary writings corresponds to the assumption that literary writings, as social products, bring a new set of materials for analysis as well as new idioms –capable of unpacking the phenomenon of honour killing and its hidden nuances. Often what remains unexpressed in society finds an expression in literature.

Translation scholar Maya Pandit, for instance, argues that translation as a cultural production in India remains far from democratized. In a country divided along caste, class, gender, religion, and ethnicity, translation operates within regimes of power, privileging and legitimizing a dominant sect—Hindu upper-caste patriarchal male writers—at the expense of women, Dalits, tribals, and minority communities (Pandit, 2020, p. 166). Despite being a numerical majority, these marginalized groups have been consistently ignored and sidelined, not only socially, politically, and economically but also in literary and translatorial practices (Salunke, 2020, p. 54). Consequently, translating texts that center on the violence of honour killing is more than a literary or translational act; it is a cultural and political intervention that amplifies the voices of women trapped within regimes of honour, caste, and violence. It also calls for translation practices in India, which have focused on translating canonical writers into English. This discussion further examines the role, agency, and qualifications of a translator working with GBV narratives. In doing so, it explores possible translation strategies, language choices, and mediation patterns, shedding light on how translators negotiate GBV in literary representations.

I begin by situating honour killing as a GBV and the literary response to it, focusing closely on the two modern but alternative Hindi narratives: *Tiriya Charittar* and *Daag Diya Sach*. Thereafter,

I situate these texts as texts of 'honour' and 'killing'. Finally, foregrounding *Triya* and *Daag* as case studies, I discuss the challenges and to some extent opportunities in translating the literary representations of 'honour killing' into English.

2. 'Honour' killing as gender-based violence

The UN Women (2024) defines Gender-based violence (GBV) as "harmful acts directed at an individual or a group of individuals based on their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms". This definition underscores the vulnerability of women and girls by arguing that they are more prone to GBV as compared to men, though men too are not entirely immune to it. Similarly, the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE, 2024) defines GBV "as a phenomenon deeply rooted in gender inequality and continues to be one of the most notable human rights violations within all societies. Gender-based violence is violence directed against a person because of their gender". In both definitions, the relative vulnerability of women and girls is clearly spelled out. In fact, GBV is so much tilted against women that quite often GBV is synonymously understood as violence against women. The World Bank identifies GBV as a global pandemic. Though not exhaustively, Amnesty International (2004) foregrounds different forms of GBV thus:

> Women in Asia and the Middle East are killed in the name of honour. Girls in West Africa undergo genital mutilation in the name of custom. Migrant and refugee women in Western Europe are attacked for not accepting the social mores of their host community. Young girls in southern Africa are raped and infected with HIV/AIDS because the perpetrators believe that sex with virgins will cure them of their disease (Amnesty International, 2004).

This list can be extended to include child marriage, trafficking of women for sex or slavery, different varieties of domestic violence, as well as sexual, emotional and psychological abuse. Even in contemporary India, violence against women is on the increase. According to the annual reports published by India's National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB), incidents of crimes against women have increased significantly over the years. Between 2010 and 2020, the number of reported cases rose from 213,585 (NCRB, 2010) to 445,256 (NCRB, 2022), marking an increase of 108.47%**.** Because of the perceived inferior status of women, most of the violence against women perpetrated in India is often normalized and enjoys high degree of social sanction. The exhibition of violence in its physical form incorporates muscular aggression such as beating, burning, different categories of sexual abuse, coercion and different types of psychological violence such as stalking and blackmailing. Even if we examine the category of murder, violence against women has increased in manifold ways for reasons so diverse such as dowry, witchcraft, female infanticide and honour killings etc.

However, even if we solely focus on 'honour killings' as one form of GBV among many others, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reports that around 5,000 women and girls are murdered annually in the so-called honour killings by members of their own families. On the other hand, independent estimates count as many as 20,000 cases of honour killings every year. According to a report published in the Asian Age on 24 June 2010, India accounts for at least 20% of the honour killings cases globally. However, it is difficult to retrieve exact data in the cases of honour killings because of the nature of crime involved. Till recently, the NCRB of India did not

include honour-based crimes or honour killings as a separate category of crime in its reports. In its report of 2020 and 2022, however, it not only included 'honour killing' as a category of crime against women but also listed 43 cases (NCRB, 2020, p. 199; NCRB, 2022, p. 165). It needs to be emphasized that a large number of honour killings go unreported as members of the family, or the clans involved try to pass them off as natural deaths or suicides. Ironically, the NCRB also records two additional crime categories: 'love affairs' and 'illicit relationships', under which 2,776 women lost their lives in 2020 and 2022 combined (NCRB, 2020, p. 199; NCRB, 2022, p. 165). It needs to be mentioned that the existing academic research does not treat these two categories as separate but manifestation of honour killings/crimes (Chowdhry, 2007; Kumar, 2015). Despite limited and questionable statics, the social existence of honour crimes across countries is a reality (Welchman & Hossain, 2006; Gill, 2009).

Understanding the problem of honour killings requires engaging with two different sources of knowledge. The first is empirical data, which provides numerical insights into the prevalence of such crimes. Many scholars have pursued this route (Chowdhry, 2007; Welchman & Hossain, 2006; Jafri, 2008), offering critical analyses of gendered violence through statistical methods. However, in this article, I uncover the problem of honour killings by taking recourse to literary discourse recognizing its potential in dialogue and in tension with other discourses such as translation studies. Elsewhere (Kumar, 2015), I have argued that honour killing is a pan-Indian theme in contemporary Indian literature, including English. However, the stories under discussion will show how the Indian writers —writing in Hindi, grapple with the issues of honour and lay bare its everyday practice. Both *Tiriya* and *Daag* represent/construct (though not limited to) honour vis-à-vis the following questions: What is honour? Where is it situated? Who are its bearers? What are the ways in which it is understood as violated? Can it be restored? Is killing of the 'erring' individuals the only method of restoring honour? These literary representations demonstrate that the issue of killing young couples for *izzat* (honour) is a contentious and complex one. These honour killings are deeply embedded in structures of caste, land ownership, gender, and sexuality**.**

Moreover, these intricacies extend to the act of translation itself**,** particularly when rendering narratives of honour-based violence into English. Translating such texts is not simply an act of linguistic conversion but a complex cultural negotiation—one that demands careful attention to issues of representation, ethics, and the politics of language. Translation plays a crucial role in mediating the representation of honour-based violence, not merely transmitting narratives but actively shaping how gender-based violence is understood across linguistic and cultural boundaries. By rendering these stories into new linguistic contexts, translation negotiates cultural specificities, ethical considerations, and audience reception, thereby influencing discourse on violence, justice, and agency. Unlike raw statistics, literature captures the nuances, emotions, and socio-cultural complexities surrounding honour-based violence, allowing for a deeper and more humanized understanding of its impact. Through translation, these narratives reach broader audiences, fostering cross-cultural awareness and challenging dominant power structures that often marginalize such voices.

It must also be mentioned that in this article, the terms 'honour killing, 'honour-based violence,' and 'honour crimes' are used interchangeably to refer to acts of violence committed in the name of preserving family or community honour. While these terms may carry nuanced

distinctions in specific legal or cultural contexts, their interchangeable use here aligns with the broader discourse on gender-based violence. Further, since the paper focuses on translating honour-based violence, it is important to consider how translation navigates culturally specific terms, legal connotations, and the socio-political weight of "honour" across linguistic traditions. The concept of honour is deeply embedded in cultural frameworks, and its meanings shift depending on historical, social, and legal contexts. As already stated, translating such narratives is not merely a linguistic task but also an ethical and political act that requires careful negotiation of terminology, ensuring that the gravity of the violence and its socio-cultural underpinnings are accurately conveyed across languages.

3. *Tiriya Charittar* and *Daag Diya Sach*: Narratives of 'honour' and killing

As mentioned earlier, *Tiriya Charittar* and *Daag Diya Sach* are written by Shivmurti and Ramnika Gupta, respectively. Both these writers, though relatively known, have not been canonized in Hindi literary circles. Shivmurti and Gupta engage consistently with the issues of caste, patriarchy, violence, gender discrimination in their literary writing, laying bare, in the process, the faultlines and fissures of a caste-ridden, patriarchal (rural) society.

Shivmurti (1950-) is one of the most prominent contemporary Hindi fiction writers. Though not prolific, with only two short story collections and three novels to his name, his work has received significant critical acclaim. He has also written travelogues, essays, and dramas, but his strength lies in long short stories (Shivmurti, 2024). These are not conventional tales; they possess both literary depth and strong sociological insights, serving as a 'reality check' on contemporary North Indian village life. Even today, notably, 65% of India's population still lives in rural areas. Shivmurti's narratives aim to uncover the trust (थाती) that sustains rural culture while candidly exposing its challenges, often stemming from persistent habitation. His empathy for village life is evident, yet he does not shy away from highlighting its dangers and ailments. Through his work, he examines pressing issues affecting rural communities, such as caste discrimination, political corruption, religious oppression, and violence against women. Shivmurti is among the few contemporary Hindi writers striving to refocus attention on rural Indian life, filling a void created after Munshi Premchand's (1880-1936) departure from the Hindi literary scene. Shivmurti's stories probe the complexities of rural existence, making them vital for understanding modern India.

On the other hand, Ramnika Gupta (1930-2019) was not only an esteemed writer but also a staunch advocate for social equality. A lifelong champion of the rights of Adivasis, Dalits, women, and minorities in India, she distinguished herself as both an organizer and a literary activist. She served as the editor of the renowned Hindi quarterly *Yudharat Aam Aadmi* (The Battling Common Man) and held key positions, including Joint Secretary of the Democratic Writers' Association (Bihar-Jharkhand Chapter) and a member of its National Council. A prominent Hindi poet and novelist, Gupta authored numerous collections of poetry, short stories, novels, and essays. Rooted in realism, her writing drew directly from her lived experiences. She believed literature should provoke discomfort, challenge perspectives, and inspire change—viewing it as a powerful tool for social transformation. A woman of passion and resilience, Gupta remained deeply engaged in political and literary struggles throughout her life. She faced police brutality and imprisonment for her

opposition to state policies. Bold in both her writing and activism, she lived authentically, dedicating her life to societal causes, with her personal, literary, and political becoming increasingly intertwined in her later years (Kumar, 2019).

A brief account of the lives and works of Shivmurti and Ramnika Gupta suggests that, for them, literary articulation is a means of resisting regimes of inequality and repression that continue to plague Indian society. Their literary pursuits are driven by a commitment to alternative perspectives. It is precisely in this context that *Tiriya Charittar* and *Daag Diya Sach* must be read, evaluated, and translated. Both texts serve as vibrant archives of memory, encapsulating oppression, humiliation, and resistance. Shivmurti and Gupta challenge many myths surrounding 'modern' young India, particularly in relation to women, by exposing the harsh realities of their lives. Yet, both texts embody a relentless determination to confront and transform the various forms of marginalization, exclusion, and disenfranchisement they endure. Translating *Tiriya Charittar* and *Daag Diya Sach*, therefore, aims to amplify the voices of the subaltern—voices that have long been silenced within dominant literary and cultural frameworks in Hindi literary tradition. These works are unsettling cultural artefacts, reflecting not only the past but also the pressing realities of the present. From a broader perspective, the translation of *Tiriya Charittar* and *Daag Diya Sach* into English exists within this framework of power politics. Translation, in this context, is not a neutral act but a deeply political one. It is not merely a linguistic transfer from Hindi to English but an active intervention in the power structures of academic, literary, and cultural discourse. Such an undertaking demands alternative perspectives, a re-evaluation of literary history, and the creation of 'new knowledge' that challenges dominant narratives. It also seeks to grant an 'afterlife' (to borrow Walter Benjamin's term) to literary texts that have long been marginalized within mainstream Hindi literary traditions.

The narrative of *Triya Charittar* follows the life of Vimli, a young girl suffering under the oppressive patriarchy that governs her home. It exposes a particular form of male dominance that uses the concept of honour to mask its own transgressions and immoral sexual crimes. As a nuanced and profound depiction of his craft, *Triya Charittar* stands as Shivmurti's serious accomplishment. Drawing from the stark realities and struggles of rural life in North India, the story traces the ruthless trajectory of patriarchy and its insidious workings within village society. Moreover, it captures the tension and honesty in representing a realistic representation of women's suppression at the hands of the ruling patriarchal order. Through Vimli, Shivmurti brings to the forefront a female protagonist whose beauty, humiliation, and desperate cries for help symbolize the plight of women in Indian society. Ultimately, the story evokes deep sympathy from readers, compelling them to question the violent male dominance it portrays, while also challenging the patriarchal male power.

In *Daag Diya Sach*, the central theme explores the consequences of forbidden love and marriage between a lower-caste Dalit boy and an upper-caste girl. He falls in love with Malati, an upper caste girl, and, despite the looming dangers, elopes with her under her persuasion. They marry at a distant relative's home, but their union exposes the cruel, intolerant fabric of rural society dictated by unequal caste relations. The upper-caste community, upon discovering that the sexuality of 'their' caste girl has been 'violated' by a Dalit, seeks vengeance. Here, caste purity and honour become the pretext for unleashing brutal violence upon the lower-caste individual. The story culminates in a tragic resolution where so-called purity and honour are restored only through the murder of the transgressor.

Understanding collectively, Shivmurti's *Tiriya Charittar* and Ramnika Gupta's *Daag Diya Sach* stand out in Hindi fiction for their unflinching portrayal of honour-based violence, gender oppression, and caste-based marginalization. Unlike mainstream Hindi literature, which often presents social issues through a symbolic or generalized lens, these texts are deeply rooted in realism, drawing directly from lived experiences to expose the brutal realities of caste, gender, and societal honour codes. While Hindi fiction has largely centered on upper-caste male perspectives, these works foreground women, Dalits, and other marginalized communities, portraying them as active agents of resistance rather than passive victims.

The radical stance of these texts makes them more than literary works—they are acts of resistance that demand an equally interventionist approach in translation. Given their use of subversive language, dialects, and oral storytelling traditions, conventional translation risks erasing their linguistic and cultural specificity. A politically aware translation strategy must preserve regional inflections, retain testimonial structures, and provide necessary contextual framing through footnotes or annotations to maintain their radicalism. Additionally, since translation is itself a political act, there is a risk of assimilating these works into dominant literary traditions, thereby neutralizing their resistance. Instead, an interventionist translation must balance accessibility with disruption, ensuring that their unsettling imagery, fragmented narratives, and political urgency remain intact. Rather than smoothing over complexities for readability, the translation process should serve as a site of contestation, allowing these subaltern voices to continue challenging hegemonic literary discourses.

4. Translating *Tiriya Charittar* and *Daag Diya Sach* into English

Translating honour-based violence into English was part of an academic project I undertook at the University of Edinburgh in 2019. However, this proved far more complex than anticipated. In my encounter with a liberalized India, Shivmurti and Gupta stood out as two of the few contemporary Hindi writers who realistically depict the intricacies of rural India and the positioning of women and lower castes within it. This was the primary reason for selecting these writers and their representative texts for translation. Shivmurti and Gupta illustrate how the political economy of the village constructs female and Dalit bodies as 'bodies of honour.' Both *Tiriya Charittar* and *Daag Diya Sach* can be seen as more radical and wide-ranging in their content than many other works addressing similar themes. Unlike Indian writing in English, which often grapples with an anxiety to establish its 'Indianness' (Kumar, 2021), Shivmurti and Gupta neither hesitate to cross nor critique the boundaries of class, caste, and gender in their portrayals of honour killings. Their writing is realistic, authentic, and enriched with the necessary vocabulary to capture the local contours emerging from the regime of honour and its corresponding violence.

Further, these texts, though perhaps unconsciously, offer an advanced critique of the empiricist notion of experience. In *Triya Charittar*, the lived experience of gendered life portrayed by Vimli is inseparable from the caste-based violence unleashed on Mahaveer in *Daag Diya Sach*. For Vimli, her gendered oppression cannot be detached from her social identity, just as Mahaveer's caste experience is inseparable from his oppression—each magnifies the other. Both narratives challenge the empiricist approach that seeks to compartmentalize social identities for analytical purposes while

ignoring the reality of their intersections. Here, honour emerges as a complex phenomenon that not only questions the boundaries of so-called 'legitimate' knowledge but also pushes the limits of standard language itself. Despite my deep familiarity with formal, standardized Hindi, I found it necessary to first undertake an 'intra-language' translation—interpreting the non-standard, regionally inflected, and often oral varieties of Hindi used in the texts—before proceeding with the English translation. Let me now illustrate some of the major challenges that I encountered while translating these two texts into English.

5. Depiction, interpretation and translation of violence

5.1 *Tiriya Charittar*

Vimli is married at the age of 13, to a boy who is born absent in the narrative. He is reported to have left his parental home to work in Kolkata as a daily wager. Visram, Vimli's father-in-law, reaches Vimli's home after 'hearing' that his *patohu* (daughter-in-law) is working in rural brick factory—a male space and 'hangs around with males'. He comes to take his *izzat*/honour (Vimli) home. When he is questioned regarding the absence of his son, he informs that he is going to come back soon. Vimli is sent to her in-law's home with a lot of fanfare. However, Visram has different ideas. He treacherously brings Vimli to his house so that he can use her for his sexual needs. But Vimli does not approve of his intentions. She fights back. Visram plays a trick. One day, he goes to the temple and brings opium-induced *charnamrit* (the holy drink) and cunningly gives it to Vimli under the guise of *prasad*. That night, eventually, he rapes her.

The segment of the story that forms the crux of our discussion here reveals that in the end, it is Vimli who is punished for Visram's crime. Courtesy Visram's false allegations (which are accepted on face value by the panchayat), Vimli is branded immoral and punished for violating the honour of the family and the village. Let us quote that segment from the original:

> A few details of the story started to emerge from 'poor' Visram's mouth, one by one. But how long could he go on? The stories about Vimli would take a lifetime. In her parental village, she would 'mother' a story every day. In fact, she left behind so many stories that, if one tried to narrate them all, a new Ramayan would emerge. Until now, Visram had kept quiet to protect his honor. But since his honor was already lost, what was the point in staying silent anymore?
> There was a truck driver; she had accompanied him many times to roam around Jharia and Dhanbad. Another man would take her to fairs. Then there was a brickmaker who regularly ordered new ornaments for her. Visram turned a blind eye to it all, thinking that one day it would come to an end. He never imagined that 'her lovers' would go so far, even crossing boundaries after she got married. God knows which one of them came, and at what time! Had she eloped from her parental village, at least Visram's face could have been saved.
> But she stained the honor of the entire village. Honor of the village! No one had thought of it until now. Can someone dishonour an entire village and get away with it? Impossible! (Shivmurti, 2010, p. 57-58, my translation).

The incident above demonstrates the treachery a man can stage to implicate an innocent woman like Vimli. Visram's language strategically constructs a negative image of Vimli, reinforcing multiple layers of stigma. By using various speaking voices, he represents a multiplicity of selves—

relational, gendered, familial, patronising, and political. In doing so, he constructs Vimli's character as licentious and loose. As a translator, I was forced to break linguistic codes so as to reveal the slyness that Shivmurti injects to portray Visram's character. For instance, the writer uses the adjective '*dukhiya*' with Visram's name though he does not mean it. Consequently, I was forced to write the word 'poor' in single inverted commas, least the English readers miss Shivmurti's irony in the original. After providing a list of men with whom Vimli is allegedly in 'relation', Visram uses the word '*log*' that literally means people as a collective word for Vimli's alleged lovers. Hence, in English translation I have used the word lovers to counter the problems of comprehension in English that might creep in if one takes the literal route and use the word 'people'. The English word 'lover' in this context connotes the dirt, filth, and dishonour which is precisely Visram's intention in using *log*. The original contains conflicting word formations that pose challenges for translation into English. Shivmurti employs such a usage deliberately to lay bare the manipulation, treachery and the ideology of patriarchy that aids Vishram's agenda of branding Vimli. Visram's accusation against Vimli's sexual (im)morality forces the villagers to set up a Panchayat to settle the dispute. What follows is a brutal tale of a woman's exploitation, humiliation and physical torture at the hands of men for a crime that Vimli never committed. The actual sequence of narrative from the story will aid us at this juncture:

> The "deliberation" drags on for a long time. Finally, Bodhan Mahto rises to announce the verdict: "A woman who has dishonoured the entire village, cutting off its nose, should not go unpunished. Even if there are legal consequences later, we'll collect funds and fight the case. But before she's sent back to her parental home, this immoral woman must be branded."
> […] Such an insult of the Panchayat! First, she tarnished the village's honor, and now she spits on its assembly. Does she think we're eunuchs? Diesel's father orders a boy to fetch an iron rod and cow-dung cakes. Women start dispersing, knowing what's coming.
> Daagna, the branding with a red-hot iron rod, is not new to Visram. He's used it to treat sick animals. But today is different; for the first time, he'll be branding a woman. When the rod turns red-hot in the fire, a group of young men force Vimli down, pinning her hands and legs. She squirms in pain, but they hold her down, enjoying the feel of her soft body. Vimli, struggling, resembles a cow on the verge of slaughter.
> Visram approaches with the glowing rod. The story of the Mahabharat repeats—humiliation and torture of a woman before a crowd.
> Will she cause another Mahabharat?
> Why? Is she a queen?
> The torchbearer lowers the torch on her face. Visram is somewhat reluctant to mark her. But everyone must endure the Karm.
> Chaannnnna! The rod touches her forehead with a sizzle. She screams in agony, the smell of burning flesh fills the air, and dogs bark, some whimpering.
> Vimli loses consciousness from the pain. The crowd steps back.
> The panchayat starts to disperse. The morning breeze has turned cooler now.
> The priest, with a heavy heart, declares, "Understanding a woman's character is no easy task!" Baba Bharathari was right: Tiriya charitram purusasya bhagyam. A group of twenty heads nod in solemn agreement (Shivmurti, 2010, p. 70-71, my translation).

This is the final scene of the story. It starkly represents the brutal nexus of honour-based violence and the mediating patriarchal power. The Panchayat's verdict is a verdict of revenge, nothing to do with the proposed justice. It is based on a preconceived notion that Vimli has sullied the collective honour of the village and therefore, she be not set free 'unstained'. The violence that is administered on Vimli's body is not only brutal but also strategic. Very selectively, the Panchayat members choose to pierce through her head, especially that part of the body where the symbolic

presence of the husband is marked with a Bindi. Since Vimli is supposed to have sullied the social contract of marriage and dishonoured the collective *izzat* of the village and her family, she must not escape without acquiring a 'permanent marker' of that violation. Her 'violation' and 'infidelity' must be engraved on her forehead so that everyone understands the lesson of 'appropriate' social behaviour. By marking her in such a way, the Panchayat relegates her to a position where she is forced to live death in life. A perennial social death.

Translating an honour killing scene from Hindi to English is filled with complex challenges that go beyond mere language transfer. For example, while translating the above scene, I navigated cultural untranslatability (*Karm, Bindi, Chaannnnna*), emotional intensity (*Daagna*), intertextuality (*Mahabharat, Baba Bharathari*), caste and gender dynamics (*Tiriya charitram purusasya bhagyam*), all while remaining faithful to the original text and respectful to the reading sensibilities of the target audience. Each of these challenges requires careful consideration and a delicate balance to ensure that the translation preserves the nuances, complexities, and emotional depth of the original scene. As a translator, my efforts were directed to ensure that the translation closely aligns with the essence of the original. This required a rigorous processing of the Hindi original—a deep understanding and respect for the source text. At times, conversation with Shivmurti, the author, was a great help to understand the meaning and complexities of certain key words such as Daagna etc.

In refining the discussion on translation strategies, I acknowledge the importance of explicitly addressing how untranslatable terms were handled. The challenges in translating culturally and linguistically dense terms—such as *daagna*, *bindi*, and intertextual references to the *Mahabharat*—necessitated a nuanced approach that balanced fidelity to the source text with accessibility for the target audience. Several strategies were considered, including glosses, footnotes, and explanatory insertions. However, the choice of strategy varied depending on the term's role within the text. For instance, *bindi* was left untranslated as it has already entered global discourse, while *daagna*, a culturally specific term tied to honour-based violence, required contextualization. Rather than interrupting the narrative with footnotes, I opted for subtle in-text explanations that preserved the immersive quality of the text while ensuring comprehension.

Intertextual references to the Mahabharat posed a distinct challenge. Instead of assuming prior knowledge, I selectively provided context within the narrative when a reference was crucial to understanding character motivations or thematic depth. This ensured that the translation remained accessible to readers unfamiliar with the epic while avoiding over-explanation that might dilute the text's literary integrity. Overall, the translation strategy prioritized reader engagement while maintaining the cultural and political weight of the original text. A more interventionist approach—such as heavy annotation—risked exoticizing the text, while excessive domestication could strip it of its subversive edge. The chosen approach reflects a careful negotiation between these extremes, ensuring that cultural specificity remains intact without creating undue barriers for the reader.

Notwithstanding the issues above, one of the key challenges was for me to maintain the rhythm and register of the original Hindi text. The honour killing scene and the immediate context before that employs formal, colloquial, or regional dialects —that are central to Shivmurti's narrative strategy. Translating these variations in tone and register into English was challenging, as English

does not always possess the same flexibility in shifting between formal and colloquial speech. The scene above involves rural characters speaking in a regional dialect that I have approximated in English. My choice could risk sounding either too formal or too contrived. Furthermore, one will notice that the Hindi sentences are longer, with a more rhythmic flow, compared to the shorter, more direct sentence structure that I have employed in English translation. Capturing the lyrical or dramatic intensity of the killing scene, while adjusting for English's structural differences, is an additional obstacle that the translator must overcome.

5.2 *Daag Diya Sach*

In *Daag Diya Sach*, Malati poses the greatest threat to the honour of her community in the story. Her decision to love and then subsequently elope with a Dalit boy Mahaveer threatens to bring shame to her family and the caste to which she belongs. However, her own family does not mind her relationship with Mahaveer. The behaviour of Malati's family fractures the chronology of 'felt' honour that travels from individual to family, from family to caste, and from caste to wider community. Here, in this case, the community takes upon itself the task of preserving family, caste, and community honour.

Malati's open defiance establishes her claim on her sexuality and on her body. Traditionally, in a patriarchal society, men claim the right over a woman's body. In practical terms, a man is the regulator of a woman's sexuality as well as her body. Malati's decision to choose her own (read sexual) partner takes away patriarchy's right to regulate and brings heavy resentment among the caste people. Malati's action brings dishonour and shame to the society, and it becomes a compulsion to reorder that dishonour and shame in some way or the other. Veena Das (1995), a well-known exponent of critical sociology argues that once dishonoured, the concept of honour starts to operate at the expense of human values and emotional sentiments for its reversal. Das further argues that the restoration of honour demands sacrifice of the natural bonds created either by biology or kinship (Das, 1995, p. 55-83). Accordingly, the Kurmis sacrifice their kinship ties with Malati to achieve a higher degree of caste and community morality, primarily for the upkeep of honour. The following scene illustrates this very clearly:

> "Look at how this girl is talking! Don't you know Mahaveer is from a low caste? We were all here—why didn't you choose one of us?"
> "Does caste even matter today? You also keep a lower-caste woman. Mohana ran off with a married woman. I liked Mahaveer, so I married him. Love can't be forced, so how could I have chosen one of you?" Malati responded instantly, defiant.
> "Education has made this girl a leader. Such a girl should be buried alive," they muttered (Gupta, 2012, p. 81, my translation).

Gupta's literary construction of Malati is very assertive. As an assertive character whenever Malati defies the caste and kinship systems in matters of love and marriage, her tone in Hindi is a mixture of anger, defiance, and ethical conviction. Hindi, as a language, can be emotionally charged, with certain phrases conveying a depth of passion that is hard to replicate in English without sounding overly dramatic or losing subtlety. For example, in the quoted lines above when Malati says, "Hamar ke Mahaveer accha lage hai. Hum ukra sang bayah karle hai" (I like Mahaveer. So, I married him).

While this has been translated literally (for I thought that is the best option there), the English translation is not able to show the rebellious, emotionally charged tone that challenges not just personal but also societal beliefs in the Indian context. The assertiveness of Malati rejecting caste-based restrictions is appearing less impactful in English. During translation, I noticed that her character positioning in the text, at times, is more implicit in its ethical positioning, with the mere act of 'speaking' working an act of defiance. There was a temptation to use more explicit statements to convey the same ethical stance. However, I refrained from it for there was a danger of the character sounding preachy or overbearing. That could have altered the reader's perception of Malati. Further, in Malati's character, Gupta re-appropriates the role and actions of women characters not merely as victims of honour-based violence but also—as agents of 'response' to the repressive patriarchal ethos. It is significant to note that in Hindi, the problem of honour is not only constructed but also deconstructed at the same time. However, this could be the topic of a separate, full-length study.

Moving on, the caste panchayat, belonging to the majoritarian group, plays a pivotal role in the sequence of the narrative. It is represented as an institution that sanctions and legitimizes the punishment given to Mahaveer and Malati as well as their families. The story shows that the panchayat does not follow any official decorum or structure in passing its judgments. It turns Malati and Mahaveer's marital transgression into a political and economic capital and gains from the sanctions imposed on the couple's 'defaulting' families. The panchayat sanctions restrictions against the so-called offenders in an arbitrary way, though the same seems to have community approval:

> Dhokar's entire family was tied and presented before the panchayat. Even their eight-year-old girl was tied to the nail of the hut. Buddhan Mahto's family was summoned too. In the stillness of the night, people came and sat around lanterns and oil-lamps. A bonfire was built at the centre. The red flame of the fire reflected in the red eyes of four hundred Kurmis who were burning in anger. The Ravidasis were traumatized to death. Their eyes turned white with fear. "Kill these bastards! Get Dhokar's daughter and rape her everyone… Only then will this bastard realize what is the honour of someone's daughter?" (Gupta, 2012, p. 78, my translation).

The extract above brings to the fore the unrestricted powers of a caste panchayat. The panchayat is not scared of the police because even the police inspector happens to belong to the same caste. The panchayat not only becomes an apparatus to humiliate and kill Mahaveer but also ends up looting both the families of their resources. Till Mahaveer and Malati are brought back for judgment, the panchayat orders a community feast at the expense of the offending families. It hardly requires any clarification that the decision of the panchayat to kill Mahaveer was blinded by caste prejudice. Further, the panchayat's celebration of Mahaveer's death brings out the moral, ethical and civil depravity in the short story:

> The whole night, Mahaveer's corpse was lying in the open. Everybody celebrated. Khichdi, snacks and liquor were served throughout the night! That day, the man who crushed Mahaveer with stones was the hero of the whole community. The great warrior, who killed a helpless, tied man. Their honour was saved, the honour of their community, the honour of their women! The honour of women, which was given to them by men and in return the women were supposed to be the slaves of men for their entire lives. The lover of the girl was hacked to death. All women were happy. The community was happy. Who could break the rule of the community? Can the cattle break the fencing of its byre? (Gupta, 2012, p. 82-83, my translation).

The two scenes just mentioned are immensely challenging for a translator due to their violent nature, heavy emotionally charged and evoking feelings of horror, grief, and moral outrage. The major challenge for me was how to convey the intensity of these emotions in English without sensationalizing the violence or trivializing its impact. The Hindi original uses an expressive tonality by employing repetition, rhetorical devices, or culturally significant metaphors to build emotional depth in both these scenes. The challenge in translation was to replicate that emotional weight in English. The strategy I employed to achieve that was the literal translation from Hindi to English. This strategy was important because it took me 'very near' to the original intention of the author. Thereafter, I took care of the ethical responsibility that comes with translating such violent acts. I was cautious not to romanticize or exoticize the violence in English. Translating graphic descriptions of brutality was particularly challenging as I felt the burden of balancing fidelity to the original text with a sensitivity towards the target audience. However, I did not mitigate the graphic nature of the scenes. I preserved their stark brutality without overamplifying them.

Speaking differently, I meticulously followed the original Hindi texts, especially in depictions of violence, without omission or manipulation. Murder and violence are central to honour crimes, and Hindi writers often use them to elicit an empathetic response from readers. For an attentive translator, any alteration or censorship of these scenes would be risky. In translating these texts, a conscious decision was made to maintain the original. Nevertheless, a significant challenge arises when Hindi authors employ different strategies to critique acts of violence. The translator must be attuned to these literary moves. For instance, in *Daag Diya Sach*, the following passage presents an explicit scene of violence:

> Meanwhile, Arjun came up with a burning log in his hand, pulled off Malati's sadee, and stripped her. He thrusted the burning log into her naked thighs. 'Take this, this is Mahaveer's pe**s! This burning will teach you a lesson.' And then he crashed the burning log into Malati's womb... the truth of Malati's existence... the truth of a woman's existence! (Gupta, 2012, p. 81).

Here, Malati's body is depicted as bearing the marks of punishment, which can be read both symbolically and strategically. The violence explicitly targets female sexual anatomy, representing the caste male's anxiety and frustration when a woman asserts her reproductive autonomy by choosing a partner outside of her caste. The direct description of the violence in this passage is unusual; writers in English, for example, often employ more indirect, suggestive techniques to depict brutality. However, Hindi writers contravene this norm by providing explicit and titillating details to emphasize the horrors of honour crimes. As a result, I decided that the English translations ought to replicate the degree and impact of violence existing in the Hindi original.

Translatorial decisions and censorship, whether explicit or self-imposed, play another significant role in translating narratives about honour killings. In dealing with scenes of extreme violence, the translator may face the temptation to omit, dilute, or adapt content to meet the sociolinguistic expectations of the target language. Honour killing narratives, often drawn from non-canonical texts, are particularly sensitive and may clash with the value systems of the recipient culture. Consequently, some form of ideological filtering is almost inevitable, even if the translator endeavours to remain as faithful as possible to the original. Ideological filtering may also occur due

to the influence of various agents involved in the translation process, such as editors, reviewers, publishers, and funders.

In other words, the role of a translator in rendering honour killings into English or any other language is multifaceted, intricate, and at times, fraught with ethical and interpretive challenges. Given the gendered nature of the crime, it becomes imperative to factor in the gender sensitivity of the translator. In the case at hand, my background of being raised in Haryana, a state in northern India, belonging to Hindi belt and Hindi literature offered an advantage. It ensured an authentic engagement with the socio-cultural milieu depicted in *Tiriya Charittar* and *Daag Diya Sach*. Moreover, having conducted doctoral research on the phenomenon of honour killing, I developed a distinctive critical sensibility towards the issue. My subjectivity leaned sympathetically towards the victims of such crimes, with the cries, helplessness, and rebellious stance of the victims serving as the primary motivation for undertaking these translations. The objective that fuelled my translation was to foreground the demand for justice as voiced by the literary characters, particularly in the face of extreme physical and psychological violence.

Furthermore, it must be stressed that the process of interpreting and understanding honour killing transcends mere textual analysis. The translator's role involves deciphering meanings embedded within social symbols and complex cultural articulations found in the literary texts. Beyond this, the translator must also account for the influence of other discourses, such as those from popular culture, in shaping interpretations of the phenomenon. The hermeneutic theorist P. Palmer provides insight into this interpretive challenge. According to Palmer (1969, p. 26), "even for the performance of reading a literary text, the performer must already 'understand' it". This understanding is not limited to explanation but is grounded in pre-existing familiarity with the subject. In other words, the translator must enter the cultural and ideological horizon of the text and merge it with this own understanding to produce a meaningful translation. This entails not only grasping the text intellectually but also being emotionally and ideologically "grasped" by the text. In the context of honour killings, the translator must do more than understand the narrative; he must interpret it in a way that facilitates connection with the audience.

Consider, for instance, the word 'honour' itself. The translator must be sensitive to the nuances of the term, which is derived from the Latin honor, and its closest equivalents in Hindi and Urdu—*izzat* and *aabru*. However, these words carry distinct connotations, not immediately apparent at the surface level. Men often invoke *izzat* in the context of social, economic, or political status, whereas women refer to *aabru* to describe their sexuality. The translator must navigate these subtle distinctions to ensure that the cultural and gender-specific meanings are adequately conveyed in the target language. In literary narratives, honour is often defined as an abstract concept, embodying a perceived quality of worthiness and respectability that influences both an individual's social standing and their self-perception, as well as that of families, castes, and communities. Translating the concept of honour killing, thus, into English presents numerous what Sandel describes as "rich points," (Carter *et al*., 2020, p. 19). We have seen that honour killing is deeply embedded in specific cultural contexts, with notions of family reputation, gender roles, and community honour often lacking direct equivalents in English language. These "rich points" emerge as translator grapples with communicating culturally specific values to English-speaking audience unfamiliar with the underlying social frameworks. The language used to describe honour killing often

carries implicit meanings related to honour, shame, and moral responsibility, which are difficult to translate without distorting or oversimplifying their significance. Such instances require the translator to carefully navigate between literal translation and contextual elaboration, especially when addressing culturally bound terms. Additionally, honour killings are closely tied to power dynamics and gender roles, often shaped by religious, legal, and cultural norms, and translation may require expanding beyond literal meanings to capture the gendered power imbalances. A further challenge lies in the degree of background explanation required for an English-speaking audience—balancing clarity with sensitivity to avoid oversimplification or stereotyping. Translating the emotional and ethical connotations of honour killings also presents a rich point, as different societies view the act through varying moral lenses, making it challenging to represent the complex perspectives of both perpetrators and victims. These rich points, while creating tensions in translation, also provide opportunities for deeper engagement with both the source and target cultures, facilitating more nuanced cross-cultural understanding, much in line with Sandel's framework on intercultural communication.

6. Conclusion

This paper witnessed the act of translating two long Hindi stories, foregrounding some in-text examples, on the theme of honour killing into English. Through an analysis of in-text examples, it has been demonstrated that translating such narratives into English is a highly complex process that extends beyond mere linguistic transfer. It demands a nuanced negotiation between linguistic precision, cultural sensitivity, and ethical responsibility. In fact, the process involves more than the mechanical act of converting words from one language to another; it requires a deep engagement with the cultural, social, and political nuances embedded in the original narratives. These narratives are deeply rooted in caste, gender hierarchies, and societal structures that regulate violence and honour, making their translation a particularly charged and challenging endeavour.

A central argument of this paper has been that translation, in the context of honour killing, is not just a literary exercise but also a political act. The translator is not a neutral mediator but an active agent who navigates the power structures embedded in both the source and target languages. This is especially significant given the way *Tiriya Charittar* and *Daag Diya Sach* challenge dominant narratives of gender, caste, and power in rural North India. The translation of these works, therefore, is not merely about linguistic accessibility but also about making visible the lived experiences of women and Dalits who have long been marginalized within literary and academic discourses.

To effectively convey these stories in English, the translator must fully understand these intricate cultural contexts to faithfully represent the original while making the narrative accessible to a wider audience. The task requires a translator to negotiate between linguistic fidelity, cultural sensitivity, and ethical responsibility. The translator must possess not only a deep understanding of the text but also the cultural and social contexts that inform it. By doing so, the translator can produce a translation that is both faithful to the original and resonant with the target audience.

The availability of these texts in English would constitute a new reading community not only at the global level but also in the southern and eastern states of India where Hindi is not used.

Availability of these narratives in English vis-à-vis 'honour killing' brings 'new' knowledge and would make a strong case to take up questions of identity, violence, caste, sexuality, and marginality in the periphery of the nation. These texts/translations can be a valuable source material for both humanities and social science researchers working on honour killing in future.

Future research could further examine how translation mediates gendered and caste-based violence in literature, particularly in texts that challenge dominant discourses on morality, honour, and justice. Addressing the ethical dilemmas of translating extreme violence, maintaining the integrity of cultural signifiers, and negotiating the balance between accessibility and authenticity are crucial concerns for translators working in this space. Ultimately, translation not only enables linguistic access but also encourages critical conversations about power, agency, and justice—conversations that are necessary to challenge the socio-cultural hierarchies that sustain honour-based violence in India and beyond.

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