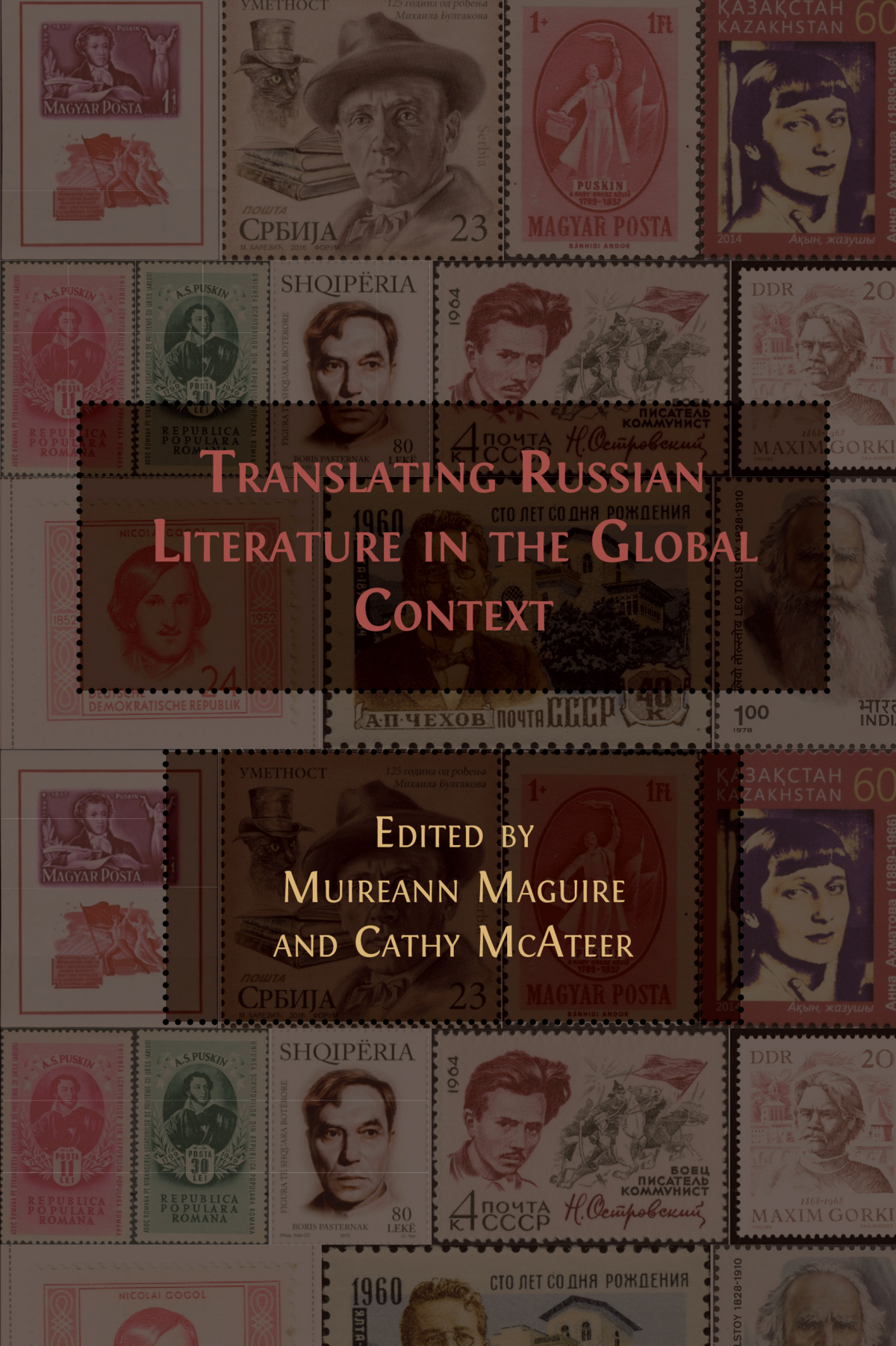

Translating Russian Literature in the Global Context

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Translation as a Cultural Event, a Journey, a Mediation, a Carnival of Creativity: A Study of the Reception of Russian Literature in Colonial and Postcolonial India

Ranjana Saxena

Translation in India: An Introduction

Although it is a multilingual space with diverse cultural practices, India's languages are connected by a common cultural thread. When reflecting upon the reception of Russian literature amongst India's reading public, we must remember that India is a multi-confessional, linguistically pluralistic country. Today's multilingualism emanates from an ancient tradition of linguistic pluralism. Thus, from Kashmir in the North to Kerala in the South, India enjoys multiple, highly developed literary cultures. As Avadesh K. Singh observes:

> present Indian multilingualism is a direct descendant of the linguistic pluralism of antiquity. Since Indians have been living with this pluralism for long, they are natural unconscious translators, who translate without caring for a methodology or theory of translation. Indians with multiple languages could shift simultaneously from one linguistic system to another with ease.[1]

In support of this, one might name Dayaram (1777–1853), the great Gujarat poet who also wrote in Hindi. Bhartendu Harishchandra (1850–85), a major

1 Avadesh Kumar Singh, 'Translation in/and Hindi Literature', *Translation Today*, 3:1 & 2 (2006), 206–27 (p. 208), https://www.academia.edu/38914808/Translation_Today_Vol_3_Issue_1_and_2.

 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0340.24

Hindi author, described himself as a poet of Sanskrit, Hindi, and Urdu; he even composed in Gujarati. In this sense, Indian consciousness is essentially a process of constant translation. Despite their cultural and linguistic diversity, Indians share a common past. The existence of regional variants of the Indian epic *Ramayana* emphasises this fact. Prominent retellings of this text include the *Kamba Ramayanam* in Tamil (a text from the twelfth century), the *Saptakanda Ramayana* in Assamese (fourteenth- or fifteenth-century), the *Bhavarth Ramayana* in Marathi (sixteenth-century), the *Ramcharitamanas* in Awadhi (also sixteenth-century), and many more. Besides its twenty-two official languages, Indian literature exists in hundreds of dialects. In this context we may endorse V.K. Gokak's view that all regional and dialectal literatures share

> [a] unique quality of Indianness [...] stemming from a cultural tradition which is five thousand years old. [...] It is noted that the earliest works of Buddhist literature were written in Pali [...]. Rabindranath Tagore and Saratchandra, Premchand and Jaisankar Prasad, Bharati, Karanth, Bendre and Thakazhi Shivashankar Pallai and of Sri Aurobindo, to name only a few, are all of a piece, in that they present a view of life and ethos which are essentially and perennially Indian.[2]

Translation, in the Western sense, was far from unknown. Early, particularly medieval, translations are better understood as retellings or adaptations of their originals. Santosh Sareen writes that, as the modern Indian languages emerged from the eleventh century onwards:

> Sanskrit technical/cultural texts began to get transferred into those languages (including Assamese, Maharashtri, Kannada, and Telugu) as a method of preserving those texts through diffusion. At the same time translations began to be made into Persian. Zain-ul-Abedin (1420–1470), the enlightened ruler of Kashmir, established a translation bureau for renderings between Sanskrit to Persian. [...] In the [late] seventeenth-[early] eighteenth century, the Sikh guru Guru Govind Singh Ji set up a translation bureau and had a large number of Sanskrit texts translated into Persian.[3]

The first professional translations emerged in the early modern period (the seventeenth century) after a 'Maktab Khana' (Translation Bureau) was established in the late 1500s by the Moghul emperor of India, Akbar.[4] Religious

2 Jagbir Singh, Kapil Kapoor and Michel Danino, 'Literatures in India', *Knowledge, Traditions and Practices of India* (Delhi: Central Board of Secondary Education, 2012), p. 4, http://cbseacademic.nic.in/web_material/Circulars/2012/68_KTPI/Module_3_1.pdf .

3 Santosh Sareen, 'Translation in India: History and Politics', *Tradução & Comunicação*, 20 (2010), 77–87 (p. 78).

4 Mohammad Asaduddin, 'Translation and Indian Literature: Some Reflections', *Translation Today*, 3:1 & 2 (2006), 1–19 (p. 3), https://www.academia.

texts such as the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana* and the *Yog Vashisht* were officially translated from Sanskrit into Persian to facilitate better mutual understanding of the cultural codes of rulers and subjects. Some critics may also consider the re-narration in Sanskrit of texts originally composed in the sacred language of the clergy into lay language as translations. Avadesh Singh writes that the "poets of the Bhakti period (1100–1700) were translators in a different and loose sense, as they strove to translate ancient Indian knowledge and wisdom manifested in different treatises through Sanskrit by appropriating it in various *bhashas* (native languages)".[5] During this period, the poet-saints of the Bhakti movement democratised knowledge of elite Sanskrit texts.

The Translation of Russian Literature in India

Russian literature was extensively translated into the languages of India. The Indian intelligentsia's first real encounter with Russian literature followed Indian independence from the British Empire in 1947. Russian literature initially came to post-independent India on a high tide of nationalistic fervour, marked by hopes for a new, egalitarian society. The works of Lev Tolstoy, Ivan Turgenev, Fedor Dostoevsky, Anton Chekhov, and Maksim Gorky enjoyed great popularity in postcolonial India. Among that section of the Indian intelligentsia inclined towards Socialism, Russia inspired sympathy. In 1941, an organisation called 'Friends of the Soviet Union' was formed as an immediate response to Germany's attack on Russia. Its patron was the first non-European to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature, Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941).

Tagore was a great Bengali polymath, a towering early twentieth-century figure, described as the "most compelling voice of Modernism in India".[6] We can safely assume Tagore's familiarity with Russian literature. As his biographer A.P. Gnatyuk-Danil'chuk writes:

> Tagore's favourite Russian writer was Ivan Turgenev [...]. In 1911, a friend of Tagore translated into Bengali, on his request, Turgenev's *Triumphant Love* [*Pesn' torzhestvuiushchei liubvi*, 1881]. Tagore himself read all he could find of Russian literature in English translation, while encouraging translations into Bengali. [...] Tagore read a lot of Russian literature in the years of the birth of the new Russia.[7]

edu/38914808/Translation_Today_Vol_3_Issue_1_and_2.

5 Singh, 'Translation in/and Hindi Literature', p. 209.

6 Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism: India's Artists and the Avant-garde 1922–1947* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 226.

7 A.P. Gnatyuk-Danil'chuk, *Tagore, India and Soviet Union, A Dream Fulfilled* (Calcutta: Firma KLM Private Limited, 1986), pp. 194–96, *Internet Archive*, https://archive.org/details/dli.bengal.10689.12744/page/n127/mode/2up?view=theater.

A leading Bengali periodical, *Bharati*, published by Tagore's acquaintance Satyendranath Datta, issued translations of Aleksandr Pushkin, Mikhail Lermontov, Afanasy Fet, and Nikolai Nekrasov into Bengali between 1878 and 1924. In an 1889 letter, Tagore mentions Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1878). Although Tagore never translated any Russian literature, its impact on his writing should not be underestimated. Mention of Tolstoy recalls another Bengali writer deeply influenced by the great Russian critical realist. One cannot ignore the thematic similarities between *Anna Karenina* and Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's *The Home Ablaze* (*Grihadaha*, 1920). The latter's creative and critical writings were deeply informed by Tolstoy's views.[8]

Gnatyuk-Danil'chuk mentions Tagore's admiration for Gorky, noting that the female protagonist of Tagore's novel *Last Poem* or the *Farewell Song* (1928) is shown reading Gorky's *Mother* (*Mat'*, 1906).[9] Gorky may be the Russian writer most widely translated into the languages of India, and *Mother* the single most widely translated novel, beginning with the Marathi translation in the early 1940s.[10] This book influenced an entire generation who came of age in the early 1960s; *Indian Literature*, the journal of the Sahitya Akademi (India's National Academy of Letters) published a five-page list of Gorky's works translated into Indian languages, naming the translators of each.[11] Megha Pansare mentions six translations of *Mother* (from English) by different translators, published in 1932, 1941, 1945, 1956, 1959 and 1968 respectively. While analysing the salient features of these translations in the context of the Marathi polysystem, Pansare reviews the context for Russian literature's emergence in this language.

The translation of *Mother* in colonial India, which was already experiencing a phase of pro-Independence nationalistic fervour, further fuelled the sentiments of literate Indians with revolutionary ideas. Well-known progressive Marathi writer Anant Kanekar wrote in his obituary on Sinclair that "Maksim Gorky from Russia and Upton Sinclair from America have become our Gods; their novels and their stories have become our scriptures".[12] *Mother*'s immense popularity in India prior to Independence can be explained in terms of contemporary socio-political exigencies of the times. It was translated multiple times into Indian languages, including Malayalam. Thus, where the reception of Gorky's *Mother* and his other writings is concerned, we may say that for Indian critics

8 See Ranjana Banerjee, 'Leo Tolstoy and Saratchandra—A Comparative Study of Their Works', *JNU*, 4–5 (2003–04), 55–66.

9 Gnatyuk-Danil'chuk, *Tagore, India and Soviet Union*, p. 196.

10 R.K. Dasgupta, 'Maxim Gorky in Indian Languages', *Indian Literature*, 11:1 (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1968), 68–73 (p. 68).

11 Ibid.

12 See Sunil Sawant, 'Revolutionary Struggle as a Counterpoint to Colonial Domination: Marathi Translations of Upton Sinclair and John Steinbeck', *Translation Journal*, 13:4 (Oct. 2009), http://www.translationjournal.net/journal/50politics.htm.

and writers the author's views on the nature and purpose of literature were as important as the literary value of his work.

The Reception of Russian Literature in Colonial and Postcolonial India

Following the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny, direct British rule was imposed in India, forcing the subcontinent into the 'Great Game', a term often used to define the political and diplomatic confrontation between Britain and Russia that endured throughout the nineteenth century. Its main agenda was control over Central Asia and the Near East. Both Britain and Russia suspected each other's political designs. Russia supposedly envied Britain's conquest of India, while Britain viewed every movement by Russia towards Central Asia as a threat to her own future plans. Meanwhile, Russia saw British expansion along the northwest frontier of India as a threat to her borders. British rulers tried to camouflage "expansionist British aims in India, and, beyond the Indian frontier [...]".[13] On the other hand, Russia's forays into Central Asia provided grounds for concern. There was general, mutual distrust between India's British rulers and the Russian Empire. Notwithstanding this ambiance of mistrust, two visionary humanist philosophers from India and Russia respectively, Mohandas (Mahatma) Karamchand Gandhi (1869–1948) and Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy (1828–1910) forged a spiritual alliance, upholding the banner of universal peace and justice. They both resisted authority in order to support the liberation of the common people, the exploited masses. Bhisham Sahni (1915–2003), a celebrated Indian writer who was also a translator of Tolstoy into Hindi, attested that British administrators feared the spread of Russian writers' ideas into Indian territory. According to Sahni, novels by Gorky were smuggled into India from Sri Lanka, and had to be read secretly.[14] Consequently, colonial India did not see much translation activity involving Russian literature into Indian languages. However, in 1923 Munshi Premchand (pseudonym of the prominent Hindi writer Dhanpat Rai Srivastava (1880–1936)), a pioneering author of Urdu and Hindustani realist social fiction, translated some of Tolstoy's short stories, which he chose for their moral content and simple style. Also at this time, Aleksandr Kuprin, Gorky, Turgenev, and Tolstoy were translated into Marathi. Gorky's works appeared in Tamil and Hindi.

13 M.A. Yapp, 'British Perceptions of the Russian Threat to India', *Modern Asian Studies*, 21:4 (1987), 647–65 (p. 647), https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X00009264.

14 See Nair K. Govindan, 'The Influence Of Maxim Gorky On Malayalam Novels between 1930 and 1960' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Kerala, 1985), http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in:8080/jspui/handle/10603/176953?mode=full.

Thus, the popularity of Russian literature in postcolonial India can be explained by many factors. Firstly, Indian independence facilitated free engagement with Russian literature; secondly, in a country afflicted until recently by foreign rule, by the just-abolished *zamindari* system of landholding and taxation, and by the caste system (the category of 'untouchable' was not abolished until 1955), the revolutionary ideas of freedom and equality for all raised the hopes of many for a just, humane society. As Rabindranath Tagore, the Bengali poet and admirer of Pushkin and Gorky, wrote following his 1930 visit to the Soviet Union:

> I had long nourished a deep repugnance for the business of *zamindari*, now it has become sordid. This time in Russia I have seen with my own eyes the shape of things I had dreamed of so long. That is why I feel so ashamed about the *zamindari* business. My mind has today left the upper seat and taken a place below. I feel sad that since my childhood I have been brought up as a parasite [...] the lavish material possessions are a barrier to my self-respect.[15]

And, thirdly, many believed that the time for literary change was overdue.

It was none other than the great doyen of Hindi literature, the so-called 'Indian Gorki' Munshi Premchand,[16] who became the beacon for the "socially-engaged, purposive literature [...] that was beginning to take shape in the 1930s", according to Rakshanda Jalil. I quote at length below from the same passage in her recent article about Premchand:

> When a group of Young Turks in London drew up a *Manifesto* of what would soon become the Progressive Writers' Movement, he published it (albeit in a slightly watered-down version) in his influential Hindi journal *Hans* in October 1935. And when the progressives decided to hold an ambitious first-of-its-kind meeting of the All-India Progressive Writers' Association (PWA) on April 9, 1936 at the Rifah-e Aam Hall in Lucknow, Premchand rose to the occasion with everything at his command as a writer. Not only did he give his whole-hearted support to this fledgling association, but his presidential address would, in later years, become a manifesto of sorts for a literary movement unlike any other in the history of this country, a movement that would shape the responses of a whole generation of Indian intelligentsia.[17]

15 See K. K. Khullar, 'Influence of October Revolution on Urdu Literature', *Indian Literature*, 24:3 (May-June 1981), 124–39 (p. 125).

16 A moniker given by Shyam M. Asnani, 'An Indian Gorki', *Indian Literature*, 18:2 (April-June 1975), 62–72 (p. 62).

17 Rakhshanda Jalil, 'For Premchand, Good Literature Was About Truth and Humanity', *The Wire*, 31 July 2017, https://thewire.in/books/

A fourth factor in the Indian preference for translating Russian literature may have been the generally pro-Socialist temperament of the intelligentsia (especially in the 1960s and 1970s). Awadesh Singh rightly remarks that in this period, the focus of literary translation changed: "translation into Hindi moved further away from England and America to Central and Eastern European countries such as Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Poland and Russia. Through the choice of source texts, this constituted indirect resistance to American hegemony".[18] As Khullar has noted, the Urdu poet Iqbal was inspired by the sensibilities of the Russian Revolution to praise manual workers and to urge the "insulted and injured" of India to resist exploitation. Similarly Premchand, who began his career as an Urdu writer, used his short story 'The Shroud' ('Kafan', 1936) and his 1936 novel *The Gift of a Cow* (*Godaan*):

> to amply illustrate the awareness that every human being has a right to carve a better life for himself. Premchand was at the forefront of the 1936 conference of Progressive Writers. Most of what he wrote after 1936 has a stamp of Russian literature. His last unfinished novel [promotes] the aura of revolution, demand for social justice and the elimination of what Tagore called 'the vulgar conceit of wealth'.[19]

Not only did the ideas behind the Russian Revolution hugely influence progressive Indian intellectuals, Russian literature of the pre- and post-Revolutionary period became the preferred reading matter of the Indian public. Many Russian literary works were translated into Marathi between 1932 and 2006. Most are works by Soviet authors (Gorky, Kuprin, Nikolai Ostrovskii, Aleksandr Fadeev, Fedor Gladkov, Vasilii Grossman, and Mikhail Sholokhov), but some are by pre-Soviet Russian authors such as Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy. 'Taras Bulba' (1835), Gogol's romantic account of a Cossack warrior, was translated four times by different Marathi translators. Russian literature was also extensively translated into Bengali, Malayalam, Tamil, Marathi, Hindi, Punjabi, and many other languages.

Many people whose childhood and/or youth were touched by Russian books, magazines, and children's literature fondly remember those days. Free magazines such as *Soviet Land* were widely shared.[20] New translations of Soviet literature, produced by the Soviet publishers Raduga and Progress, were popular throughout India. Even today, one can still experience an almost palpable nostalgia for Russian literature in India. Several cultural meeting points attest to

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premchand-hindi-literature. Jalil also notes that Premchand was influenced by both Gandhi's teachings and the Russian Revolution.

18 Singh, 'Translation in/and Hindi Literature', p. 222.

19 Khullar, 'Influence', p. 127.

20 The magazine was published for Indian readers in thirteen languages including Marathi, Bangla, Hindi, Tamil, Telegu, Kannada, Urdu, and English, by Progress Publishers and Raduga Publishers.

such a phenomenon. Situated in Kolkatta, Manisha Granthalaya—a bookstore-cum-publishing house—is one such example.[21] It was launched by the Indian Communist Party in 1964 to sell and translate Russian books into Bengali. None other than the glorious Bishnu Dey, "the 'rebel' poet and harbinger of modernism in Bengali verse", gave the store its name.[22] This bookshop became a meeting place for Bengali intellectuals. Such was the influence of the progressive idealism emanating from Soviet Russia. "Here booksellers are familiar with Tolstoy, Gogol, Gorky, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov. Tell them what you are looking for and they will whip it out from the towering stacks. Most are by Raduga and Progress Publishers".[23] Another such treasure trove is situated in the misty valleys of Wayanad, Kerala.[24] This is an amateur venture by a couple who still cherish their childhood love of Soviet books. Their desire to pass on this legacy to future generations led them to set up this bookstore.[25] Reminiscing about her grandfather's collection of Russian books, Deepa Bhashthi writes that she continues to be intrigued by the "reach of these distribution networks, down to the smallest of towns".[26] She adds:

> I grew up in a village in the hills, a blip on the map of South India. To this day we do not have a bookstore in town, except for the newspaper vendor who stocks select pulp-fiction titles alongside gossip tabloids and the day's newspapers. And when I was growing up, there were no online marketplaces to log on to, of course. But there was Grandpa and his books from Russia. […] I hear these books are now fast becoming collectibles. For a generation that came of age at the cusp of that very strange period in India when socialism ended and capitalism was becoming wholeheartedly embraced, these books remain a kind of sentimental paraphernalia.[27]

21 The Hindi word 'Manisha' stands for intellect/decisive wisdom in the English language. 'Granthalaya' can be translated as 'a library'.

22 Anon., 'Manisha Granthalaya The Bookstore Which Still Sells Russian Books', *Get Bengal*, 31 January 2022, https://www.getbengal.com/details/manisha-granthalaya-the-bookstore-which-still-sells-russian-books.

23 Anuradha Sengupta, 'Let's Talk Pushkin', *The Hindu*, 20 May 2017, https://www.thehindu.com/society/lets-talk-pushkin/article18508547.ece.

24 K.P. Aswini, 'Wayanad's Odd Library is a Wonder World of Soviet Books', *Mathrubhumi.com*, 8 May 2019, http://englisharchives.mathrubhumi.com/features/web-exclusive/wayanad-s-odd-library-is-a-wonder-world-of-soviet-books-1.3780560.

25 Divya Sreedharan, 'How Soviet Children's Books Became Collectors' Items in India', *Atlas Obscura*, 14 April 2021, https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/soviet-childrens-books-in-india.

26 Deepa Bhasthi is a writer and blogger based in Madikeri/ Bangalore, Karnataka, India. She can be contacted at deepabhasthi@gmail.com.

27 Deepa Bhasthi, 'Growing Up with Classic Russian Literature in Rural South India', *Lithub*, 28 February 2018, https://lithub.com/growing-up-with-classic-russian-literature-in-rural-south-india/.

Such "passion projects", driven by nostalgia for Soviet-era books, point towards the fact that Russian literature, for numerous reasons, was well received in India. On the afterlife of literary works, Walter Benjamin wrote, "[j]ust as the manifestations of life are intimately connected with the phenomenon of life without being of importance to it, a translation issues from the original—not so much from its life as from its afterlife".[28] Russian literature is surely experiencing just such an afterlife in India.

Reception of Russian Literature: The "Imaginaries of Translation"[29]

Translation Studies are replete with "theoretical works that focus on the work of individual translators, but accounts of translators' histories are often structured in an anecdotal and descriptive fashion, and constitute records of accomplishments or, frequently, discussions of translation 'errors' and infelicitous decisions".[30] However, more recent scholarship is "increasingly addressing the complexities of the role and legacy of the translator".[31]

The literature of one country may influence the literary processes of another in many ways. The act of translation is not a linear process; rather it produces a multilayered impact on the consciousness of the translator. Translation thus provides ground for real or imagined cultural encounters, which in turn produce new creative writing: translation is an inherently creative activity. These meetings, whether real or imaginary, may lead to the production of new fiction that reflects the activity of translation or imaginary dialogues between the translator and the translated—a concept which has been labelled the "Imaginary of Translation", acknowledging "the subjectivity of translators, their psychological activities and their imaginary production".[32] This concept can be used to understand the dynamics of a different kind of literary reception, one mediated by the translator and touched by his or her imagination. To illustrate this point, I will briefly discuss below pertinent texts from the Marathi, Malayalam, and Hindi languages.

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28 Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings (1926–1931)*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings et al., 4 vols (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press, 2020), p. 254.

29 Christina Bezari, Riccardo Raimondo and Thomas Vuong, 'The Theory of the Imaginaries of Translation', special issue of *Itinéraires*, 2/3 (2019), https://doi.org/10.4000/itineraires.5077.

30 Maria Constanza Guzmán, 'Towards a Conceptualization of the Translator's Legacy', *Forma y Funcion*, 22:1 (June 2009), 181–201, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237029944_TOWARDS_A_CONCEPTUALIZATION_OF_THE_TRANSLATOR'S_LEGACY.

31 Ibid.

32 Christina Bezari et al, 'The Theory of the Imaginaries', paragraph 16.

A Carnival of Cultural Mutualities

Rajendra Yadav (1929–2013) was a well-regarded Hindi writer active in post-independence India. He participated in the 'Nayi Kahani' ('New Story').[33] movement that emerged in Hindi literature between 1954 and 1963. Yadav translated Russian writers including Lermontov, Turgenev, and Anton Chekhov. His very intense engagement with Chekhov (he studied the Russian author's biography and personal philosophy as well as his literary texts) led him to create an imaginary dialogue with the author, set in Moscow just before the latter's death. This was Yadav's 'An Interview with A. P. Chekhov—An Interview That Was Delayed By Fifty Years' (1955).[34] This fictitious interview covers various personal details of Chekhov's life, such as his difficult and lonely childhood; his love life and marriage to Olga Knipper, his relationship with Gorky and Tolstoy, his views on Turgenev's "unreal women characters", and so on. Finally, Chekhov narrates his journey to Sakhalin, offering virulent criticism of the Tsar's policies. Yadav's information was sourced from letters to and from Chekhov's contemporaries, as well as the text of *Sakhalin Island* (*Ostrov Sakhalina*, 1893); he also consulted the work of Chekhov's later, Western biographers, such as David Magarshack.

Ganesh Prabhakar Pradhan's *Letters to Tolstoy* is another example of the reception of Russian literature in India through the "imaginary of translation".[35] Pradhan (1922–2010) was a follower of Gandhi who participated in India's struggle for independence. He also taught English literature; Tolstoy was his idol. The *Letters* were initially written in 2006 in Marathi, and translated into English a year later. Unsurprisingly, as a professor of literature, Pradhan's epistolary novel manifests his own deep critical understanding of Tolstoy's creative oeuvre and its context. Pradhan's dialogue with Tolstoy is informed by his exhaustive grasp of both Indian and Russian politics and society, as well as of Russian literature. Pradhan also comments on relations between Tolstoy and his peers Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov. He highlights the mutual appreciation between these writers despite their profound differences of opinion on socio-political and literary issues. In his *Letters*, Pradhan advises Tolstoy to complete his unfinished novel, *The Decembrists*, which he argues would have helped the

33 For more information about 'Nayi Kahani' ('New Story'), see Nikhil Govind, 'Nayi Kahani', in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism* (Taylor and Francis, 2016), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781135000356-REM673-1. Madhu Singh, 'Altered Realities, New Experiences: Bhisham Sahni, Nirmal Verma, and the "Nayi Kahani" Movement', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 53:2 2016), 312–33, https://doi.org/10.5325/complitstudies.53.2.0312. Raghuvir Sinha, 'Social Change in Contemporary Hindi Literature Indian Literature', *Indian Literature*, 17:3 (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1974), 9–22.

34 Rajendra Yadav, 'An Interview with A.P. Chekhov—An Interview That Was Delayed by Fifty Years', *Internet Archive*, https://archive.org/download/in.ernet.dli.2015.522559.

35 Ganesh Prabhakar Pradhan, *Letters to Tolstoy* (Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 2008).

Indian youth to choose the correct path for social transformation. Pradhan asks Tolstoy whether, in the absence of a truly just system of government even in the twenty-first century, injustice can be resisted non-violently. *Letters* also contains an essay describing imaginary conversations in heaven between Gandhi and Tolstoy.

The 2021 commemoration of the bicentennial of Dostoevsky's birth increased awareness of his work and of his reception to date in India. Here, I will introduce Perumbadavam Sreedharan (b. 1938), a well-known Malayalam writer from the South Indian state of Kerala. He has been a prolific author of fiction. *Like a Psalm* (*Oru Sankeerthanam Pole*, 1993) is his most famous and critically acclaimed novel, for which he received the prestigious Vayalar Award for outstanding Malayalam fiction in 1996. This novel was inspired by Perumbadavam's love for Russian literature and for Dostoevsky in particular. As we have seen, Russian literature was widely distributed in India in the 1960s and 1970s, including in Kerala; arguably, "Soviet influence in the state in the 1960s and 70s [...] shaped the perspectives and sensibilities of generations of youngsters".[36] Perumbadavam's own reading of *Crime and Punishment* inspired his subsequent engagement with Russian literature, as the quotation below reveals. As the contemporary Malayalam author K. R. Meera comments, "Perumbadavam's book can be read as a Russian book [...]".[37] *Like A Psalm* novelises Dostoevsky's difficult life, narrating his affair with his stenographer Anna Snitkina, who later became his wife. This kind of manifestation of admiration for Dostoevsky can happen only when a writer has deeply internalised the life and works of the writer. *Like A Psalm* is set in St Petersburg, even though Perumbadavam had never visited the city. In recent years, the novel has been adapted for the screen as a docu-fiction named *In Return: Just A Book*. Perumbadavam himself described his work thus:

> When I first read the translation of *Crime and Punishment* as a 16-year-old, I was taken to a different world. I read it again and again like a holy text. I read more of [Dostoevsky's] works in Chennai and here in Thiruvananthapuram, especially at the Public Library. I realized that of all the characters he had created, he himself is the best. Call it my stupidity or my pride; I decided to write a novel about him.[38]

Like A Psalm has sold nearly three hundred thousand copies to date.[39]

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36 Anjuly Mathai and Vaisakh E. Hari, 'How Soviets Invaded an Indian State, Two Decades Before it Collapsed', *The Week*, 8 December 2017, https://www.theweek.in/webworld/features/society/how-dostoevsky-reincarnated-kerala-century-after-his-death.html.

37 Ibid.

38 M. Athira, 'A World of His Own', *The Hindu*, 31 March 2017, https://www.thehindu.com/society/author-perumbadavam-sreedharan-on-his-workspace/article17749857.ece.

39 Kalyanee Rajan, 'Redeeming an Awkward Dostoevsky', The Pioneer, 3 June 2018, https://www.dailypioneer.com/2018/sunday-edition/redeeming--an-awkward--dostoevsky.html.

Conclusion

Indian and Russian intellectuals have been engaged in meaningful dialogue for a long time. This dialogue continues, facilitated by translators. Translators of Russian literature into Malayalam, Marathi, Hindi, Urdu, Panjabi, Tamil, Kannada, Bengali, and many more literatures played a pivotal role in creating this space for communion. In Pascale Casanova's words, the translator is "an indispensable intermediary for crossing the borders of the literary world, is an essential figure in the history of writing".[40]

40 Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. by Malcolm DeBevoise (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999; repr. 2007), p. 142.