

From Text to Context: Translation and the Global Rearticulation of Social Justice in Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* and *La Déesse et le Marchand*

Dr. Sumeer Ranjan^{1*}, Dr. Abhaya Ranjan², Dr. Diksha Verma³, Dr. Nipun Nutan⁴

¹Designation* :Assistant Professor,Amity School Of Foreign Languages,Amity University Jharkhand

Email: sranjan@rnc.amity.edu Orcid Id: 0009-0003-2977-3699

²Designation* :Associate Professor,Amity School Of Foreign Languages,Amity University Jharkhand

³Designation* :Assistant Professor,Amity Institute of English and Research Studies,Amity University Jharkhand

⁴Designation* :Assistant Professor, Centre for French and Francophone Studies, JNU, New Delhi

ABSTRACT

This article examines Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* (2019) and its French translation *La Déesse et le Marchand* (2023), translated by Myriam Bellehigue, to investigate how translation functions as a critical site of cultural mediation in the global circulation of social justice narratives. Drawing on postcolonial feminist theory, subaltern studies, and contemporary translation studies, the paper employs a qualitative comparative textual analysis to explore how key themes female agency, caste hierarchy, ecological displacement, and colonial power are articulated in the English original and reinterpreted in the French translation. The study argues that translation is not a neutral act of linguistic transfer but an ideological process that reshapes meanings across cultural contexts. Through close analysis of lexical choices, register shifts, and structural transformations, the paper demonstrates that while the French translation preserves the core concerns of the source text, it introduces subtle yet significant interpretive shifts. These include the amplification of mythic feminine agency through title transformation, the recontextualisation of caste and class within a European sociolinguistic framework, and the modulation of critique related to global capitalism and migration. The shift from *Gun Island* to *La Déesse et le Marchand* is particularly significant, as it reorients the narrative from a linguistic and postcolonial mystery toward a relational and symbolic framework centered on feminine mediation. Ultimately, the article contributes to translation studies by showing how translation actively participates in the reconfiguration of postcolonial discourse, producing new meanings of gender equity and social justice in transnational literary contexts.

Keywords: Postcolonial Translation, Amitav Ghosh, *Gun Island* and *La Déesse et le Marchand*, Gender and Translation, Social Justice, Cultural Mediation.

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected literary world, translation has become a central mechanism through which texts circulate across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Yet, despite its global significance, translation is still frequently perceived as a secondary or derivative act a mere transfer of meaning from one language to another. Such a view overlooks the transformative potential of translation, particularly in the context of postcolonial literature, where language is deeply entangled with questions of power, identity, and representation. As Lawrence Venuti argues, translation is never neutral or invisible; rather, it is an interpretive practice shaped by ideological, cultural, and institutional forces (Venuti 15). Translation, in this sense, constitutes a site where meanings are actively negotiated, reconfigured, and sometimes contested.

This interpretive dimension becomes especially significant when translating postcolonial texts, which often foreground issues such as gender inequality, caste hierarchies, ecological displacement, and the enduring effects of colonial power. These narratives are not only

culturally specific but also politically charged, embedding within their linguistic textures the histories and structures of marginalization. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak emphasizes that translation entails an ethical responsibility to the “rhetoricity” of the original, cautioning against the erasure of cultural specificity in the pursuit of accessibility (Spivak, *Politics of Translation* 179). Similarly, Antoine Berman conceptualizes translation as an *épreuve de l'étranger*, a trial of the foreign, in which the translator is tasked with preserving the alterity of the source text rather than domesticating it into familiar forms (Berman 284). Together, these perspectives invite a reconceptualization of translation not as a transparent conduit, but as a complex process of cultural mediation in which ideological meanings are reshaped as texts move across languages.

Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* (2019) offers a compelling site for such an inquiry. The novel weaves together themes of migration, climate change, caste-based exclusion, and gendered agency within a transnational narrative that spans the Sundarbans, the Mediterranean, and beyond. It situates contemporary crises within longer histories of colonialism, trade, and environmental transformation,

thereby foregrounding the interconnectedness of global systems of power. Its French translation, *La Déesse et le Marchand* (2023), translated by Myriam Bellehigue, provides a particularly fruitful case to examine how these themes are rearticulated within a different linguistic and cultural context. While the translation retains the narrative structure and many of the thematic concerns of the original, it also introduces subtle shifts in tone, emphasis, and cultural framing shifts that have significant implications for the representation of social justice.

Existing scholarship on *Gun Island* has largely approached the novel through ecocritical, postcolonial, and migration-oriented frameworks, with particular attention to climate crisis, transnational mobility, and the Anthropocene. While these studies have contributed to a deeper understanding of Ghosh's engagement with global environmental and political issues, they have generally treated the text in its original linguistic form, without systematically examining how its meanings are transformed in translation. At the same time, translation studies has increasingly addressed questions of ideology, power, and cultural representation, moving beyond earlier concerns with equivalence and fidelity. Scholars such as Venuti have demonstrated how translation strategies influence the visibility of cultural difference (Venuti 19), while Gideon Toury has emphasized the role of norms in shaping translation within target cultures (Toury 56). However, there remains a relative lack of integration between translation studies and analyses of social justice themes particularly with respect to how translation reshapes representations of gender, caste, and ecological displacement in contemporary world literature.

This article addresses this gap by offering a comparative analysis of *Gun Island* and its French translation through the combined lenses of postcolonial feminism, subaltern studies, and contemporary translation theory. It argues that translation functions as a critical site of ideological mediation in which meanings of gender, caste, ecology, and colonial power are not simply transferred but actively reinterpreted. By focusing on both micro-level linguistic shifts such as lexical choices, register modulation, and semantic nuance and macro-level transformations, including title reconfiguration and narrative reframing, the study demonstrates how translation redistributes emphasis and reshapes the ideological contours of the text.

A particularly significant example of this process is the transformation of the title from *Gun Island* to *La Déesse et le Marchand*. While the English title foregrounds a linguistic and postcolonial enigma centered on the term *bundook*, the French title reorients the narrative toward a relational and symbolic framework structured around the figures of the Goddess and the Merchant. This shift exemplifies how translation can redefine the interpretive horizon of a text, influencing how readers engage with its themes of gender, ecology, and justice. Similarly, lexical and stylistic shifts such as the rendering of caste-based insults, class markers, and economic terminology demonstrate how translation mediates the representation of social hierarchies and global inequality within new cultural contexts (Berman 278; Venuti 20).

By bringing together insights from postcolonial feminist theory, subaltern studies, and translation studies, this

article advances a novel interdisciplinary approach to the study of translation and social justice. It moves beyond generalized claims that translation is ideological to show, through detailed textual analysis, how specific translational choices produce meaningful shifts in representation. In doing so, it contributes to a growing body of scholarship that views translation as a form of cultural production one that participates in the global rearticulation of postcolonial narratives rather than merely transmitting them (Lefevere 8).

Ultimately, this study argues that translation is not simply a bridge between languages, but a site of negotiation where meanings are reconfigured in response to new cultural, linguistic, and ideological contexts. The movement from *Gun Island* to *La Déesse et le Marchand* thus illustrates how translation plays an active role in shaping contemporary understandings of gender, caste, ecological displacement, and social justice within global literary circulation.

2. RESEARCH GAP AND OBJECTIVES

Translation and the Missing Link in Social Justice Studies

While the fields of postcolonial studies, subaltern studies, and translation studies have each produced substantial scholarship on issues of power, identity, and representation, their intersection remains insufficiently explored particularly in relation to the translation of social justice narratives. Postcolonial scholars have extensively examined how literary texts foreground histories of colonial domination, caste hierarchies, gendered oppression, and ecological crisis (Said 25; Chakrabarty 18). Similarly, subaltern studies have emphasized the recovery of marginalized voices and the critique of elite historiography (Guha 12). However, these approaches often treat literary texts in their original linguistic form, without adequately considering how translation reshapes these meanings as texts circulate globally.

At the same time, translation studies has moved beyond earlier concerns with equivalence and fidelity to address questions of ideology, power, and cultural representation. Scholars such as Lawrence Venuti have demonstrated how translation is implicated in the domestication or foreignization of texts, influencing how cultural difference is perceived in the target language (Venuti 19). Antoine Berman, in his critique of ethnocentric translation, highlights how translation can deform the foreign text through processes of rationalization and clarification (Berman 278). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak further underscores the ethical responsibility of the translator to preserve the "rhetoricity" of the original, warning against the erasure of subaltern voices through homogenizing translation practices (Spivak 179). Despite these theoretical advances, translation studies has rarely been systematically integrated with analyses of social justice themes such as caste, gender, and ecological displacement in contemporary global literature.

This gap becomes particularly evident in the context of Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*, a novel that engages deeply with interconnected issues of climate change, migration, caste-based exclusion, and gendered agency. While existing literary criticism has examined Ghosh's work through ecocritical and postcolonial lenses, there is a notable absence of studies that investigate how these

themes are rearticulated in translation—especially in non-Anglophone contexts. The French translation, *La Déesse et le Marchand*, provides a compelling case to explore how meanings of social justice are mediated across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Yet, the ideological implications of such mediation remain underexplored.

This study addresses this gap by positioning translation as a crucial, yet often overlooked, site in the production and circulation of social justice discourse. It argues that translation does not merely reproduce the thematic concerns of the source text but actively participates in their reinterpretation, thereby shaping how global audiences engage with issues of gender, caste, and ecological justice. In doing so, the paper contributes to a growing body of scholarship that seeks to reconceptualize translation as a form of cultural and ideological negotiation rather than a neutral transfer of meaning. Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How are themes of gender equity, caste hierarchy, ecological displacement, and colonial power articulated in Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*?
2. How does the French translation, *La Déesse et le Marchand*, negotiate and reinterpret these themes across linguistic and cultural contexts?
3. What kinds of linguistic and stylistic shifts occur in translation, and how do these shifts affect the representation of social justice?
4. To what extent does translation function as an ideological mediator that reshapes postcolonial narratives in global literary circulation?

Based on these questions, the primary objectives of the study are:

- To conduct a comparative textual analysis of the English source text and its French translation, focusing on key thematic and linguistic features.
- To examine how translation strategies influence the representation of gender, caste, and ecological justice.
- To identify the ways in which micro-level linguistic shifts produce macro-level ideological transformations.
- To contribute to the theoretical understanding of translation as a site of cultural mediation and ideological rewriting.

By addressing these objectives, the article seeks to bridge the gap between translation studies and social justice discourse, demonstrating that translation is not merely a conduit for meaning but an active force in the global rearticulation of postcolonial concerns.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Intersections of Postcolonial Feminism, Subaltern Studies, and Translation Theory

This study adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical

framework that brings together postcolonial feminism, subaltern studies, and translation theory to examine how meanings of gender, caste, and social justice are constructed and mediated across languages. These frameworks collectively enable an analysis that moves beyond textual comparison to interrogate the ideological and cultural processes shaping translation. By situating translation within broader structures of power, this approach foregrounds how literary texts and their translations participate in the production and circulation of knowledge about marginalized identities.

3.1 Postcolonial Feminism and Gendered Agency

Postcolonial feminism provides a critical lens to examine how gender intersects with colonial histories, class hierarchies, and cultural specificities. Unlike universalist feminist frameworks, postcolonial feminism emphasizes the situated experiences of women in the Global South, highlighting how their agency is shaped by overlapping structures of power (Mohanty 61). In literary texts, female characters often emerge as agents of resistance, negotiating both patriarchal and neo-colonial constraints.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's work is particularly significant in this regard, as it interrogates the conditions under which subaltern women can speak and be heard within dominant discourses (Spivak 271). Her critique underscores the risks of epistemic violence, where marginalized voices are appropriated or erased. In the context of translation, this raises important ethical questions: how can the translator preserve the complexity of gendered agency without reducing it to culturally familiar tropes? Translation, therefore, becomes a site where feminist concerns are not only transmitted but also reinterpreted.

3.2 Subaltern Studies and the Politics of Voice

Subaltern studies, as articulated by Ranajit Guha and later expanded by scholars such as Dipesh Chakrabarty, seeks to recover the voices of those excluded from elite historiography particularly peasants, laborers, and marginalized castes (Guha xii; Chakrabarty 6). Central to this framework is the recognition that subaltern identities are often mediated through dominant discourses, which shape how their experiences are represented and understood.

In literary narratives, subalternity is frequently articulated through language dialects, registers, and culturally specific terms that encode social hierarchies. However, when such texts are translated, these linguistic markers must be negotiated within the constraints of the target language. This process raises questions about the visibility of subaltern voices: does translation preserve their distinctiveness, or does it assimilate them into more familiar categories? As Spivak argues, translation can either enable or foreclose the possibility of subaltern expression, depending on how it engages with linguistic and cultural difference (Spivak 179). Thus, the politics of voice becomes central to understanding translation as an

ideological practice.

3.3 Translation as Cultural and Ideological Mediation

Contemporary translation theory increasingly recognizes translation as an *ulqunhul* process of cultural and ideological mediation rather than a neutral transfer of meaning. Lawrence Venuti's distinction between domestication and foreignization highlights how translation strategies shape the reception of the foreign text, often privileging fluency and readability at the cost of cultural difference (Venuti 20). Similarly, Antoine Berman critiques ethnocentric translation practices that "deform" the foreign text through rationalization, clarification, and normalization, advocating instead for an ethical translation that preserves alterity (Berman 278).

French translation theorists such as Henri Meschonnic further extend this perspective by emphasizing the importance of rhythm, discourse, and subjectivity in translation. For Meschonnic, translation is not merely about transferring meaning but about reproducing the "poetics" of the text, including its ethical and cultural dimensions (Meschonnic 45). This approach challenges reductive models of equivalence and underscores the transformative nature of translation.

Additionally, Gideon Toury's descriptive translation studies framework provides a methodological foundation for analyzing translation as a norm-governed activity within specific cultural systems (Toury 56). By examining patterns of shifts and regularities, this approach enables a systematic understanding of how translations function within target cultures.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives position translation as a site where linguistic choices carry ideological weight. Translation becomes an act of rewriting that can reinforce, modify, or challenge existing power structures. In this study, the intersection of postcolonial feminism, subaltern studies, and translation theory allows for a nuanced analysis of how meanings of gender, caste, and social justice are not only conveyed but also transformed in the movement from source text to translation.

4. METHODOLOGY

A Qualitative Comparative Approach to Translation Analysis

This study employs a qualitative comparative methodology to examine how meanings of gender, caste, ecological displacement, and social justice are articulated in Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* (2019) and reconfigured in its French translation, *La Déesse et le Marchand* (2023), translated by Myriam Bellehigue. Given the interpretive and ideologically embedded nature of translation, a qualitative approach is particularly suited to capturing the nuanced shifts in meaning that occur across linguistic and cultural contexts. Rather than quantifying translation

shifts, this study prioritizes close textual analysis to understand how language mediates power, identity, and representation.

The corpus for this study consists of selected parallel passages from the English source text and the French translation, chosen based on their thematic relevance to the central concerns of the paper: gendered agency, caste hierarchies, ecological crisis, and migration. These excerpts are not randomly selected but purposively sampled to represent key narrative moments where social justice issues are explicitly foregrounded. This approach aligns with the principles of descriptive translation studies, which emphasize the analysis of actual translation practices within their cultural contexts (Toury 56). By focusing on thematically significant segments, the study ensures that the analysis remains both targeted and theoretically grounded.

Methodologically, the study adopts a comparative textual analysis that operates at two interconnected levels: the micro-linguistic and the macro-ideological. At the micro level, the analysis examines lexical choices, register shifts, syntactic restructuring, and semantic nuances between the source and target texts. These include, for instance, variations in terms related to caste identity, gendered descriptors, and socio-economic categories. At the macro level, the study interprets how these linguistic shifts contribute to broader ideological transformations, such as the reframing of social justice, the modulation of political critique, and the reconfiguration of narrative emphasis. This dual-level analysis is informed by Antoine Berman's notion of "deforming tendencies," which highlights how translation processes such as rationalization, clarification, and ennoblement can alter the foreign text (Berman 278).

In addition to Berman, the methodological framework draws on the work of French translation theorist Henri Meschonnic, who emphasizes the importance of discourse, rhythm, and subjectivity in translation. For Meschonnic, meaning is inseparable from the form and rhythm of language, and translation must therefore engage with the "poetics" of the text rather than merely its semantic content (Meschonnic 45). This perspective informs the study's attention to stylistic and tonal shifts, particularly in the representation of voice and agency.

The analysis also incorporates Lawrence Venuti's conceptualization of domestication and foreignization as strategic choices that shape how cultural difference is represented in translation (Venuti 20). By examining whether the French translation retains or adapts culturally specific markers such as caste terminology or local expressions the study evaluates the extent to which the translation preserves alterity or aligns with target-language norms. Furthermore, Gideon Toury's concept of translation norms provides a framework for understanding how such choices are conditioned by the expectations of the target culture and literary system (Toury 57).

Importantly, this methodology recognizes that translation

is not a purely linguistic operation, but a culturally situated practice influenced by historical, social, and ideological factors. As such, the analysis remains attentive to the broader context of reception, considering how the French translation may respond to the interpretive frameworks of its readership. By integrating close textual analysis with theoretical insights from both Anglophone and Francophone translation traditions, this study offers a comprehensive methodological approach to understanding translation as a site of cultural and ideological mediation.

5. GENDERED AGENCY ACROSS LANGUAGES

From Institutional Authority to Mythic Feminine Power

The representation of female agency in Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* and its French translation *La Déesse et le Marchand* reveals how translation mediates gendered subjectivity across linguistic and cultural contexts. While the English source text foregrounds women as agents of institutional, scientific, and intellectual authority, the French translation subtly reframes this agency through symbolic and mythic registers. This shift illustrates how translation participates in the reconfiguration of feminist meaning, moving from material forms of resistance toward a more relational and culturally embedded articulation of feminine power. Such transformations align with the broader understanding of translation as an interpretive act shaped by ideological and aesthetic choices (Venuti 20; Berman 278).

5.1 Nilima Bose: Institutional Resistance and Social Reform

In the English text, Nilima Bose emerges as a figure of institutional authority and social reform, embodying a form of postcolonial feminist resistance grounded in praxis. Her decision to defy her elite family background and establish the Badabon Trust positions her as a key agent in addressing gendered and socio-economic inequalities in the Sundarbans. Her characterization as a “figure whose credibility was beyond question” underscores her moral authority and leadership within a marginalized community.

The French translation “une figure jouissant d’une *crédibilité totale*” preserves this authority while subtly intensifying its formal and institutional dimension. The phrase “*crédibilité totale*” resonates with a discourse of legitimacy that aligns with French sociopolitical registers, thereby reinforcing Nilima's role as a socially sanctioned agent of reform. However, this shift also reflects what Antoine Berman describes as a tendency toward “clarification,” where the translation renders implicit meanings more explicit, potentially altering the texture of the original (Berman 278). From a postcolonial feminist perspective, Nilima's agency remains intact, yet its representation becomes more aligned with institutional legitimacy than with the nuanced interplay of personal defiance and social commitment emphasized in the source

text.

5.2 Piya Roy: Scientific Authority and Ecological Activism

Piya Roy represents another dimension of gendered agency, grounded in scientific expertise and ecological activism. As a marine biologist, she challenges corporate power structures and advocates for environmental justice, thereby embodying a form of feminist resistance that intersects with ecological concerns. In the English text, Piya is described as “strong” and “independent,” emphasizing her professional competence and personal resilience.

The French translation renders this characterization as “*sacré caractère*,” a phrase that introduces a culturally specific nuance. While retaining the sense of strength, it also conveys a spirited or forceful personality, thereby shifting the emphasis from professional authority to individual temperament. This transformation can be understood through Henri Meschonnic's emphasis on the role of rhythm and subjectivity in translation, where meaning is not merely semantic but also shaped by the discursive and cultural context of the target language (Meschonnic 45). Consequently, Piya's agency is not diminished but rearticulated, reflecting a different cultural framing of feminine strength that blends competence with expressive individuality.

5.3 Reframing Feminine Agency: The Goddess in Translation

The most significant transformation of gendered agency occurs at the level of narrative framing, particularly through the translation of the title from *Gun Island* to *La Déesse et le Marchand*. While the English title foregrounds a linguistic and postcolonial mystery, the French title reorients the narrative toward a relational dynamic centered on the Goddess, Manasa Devi. This shift elevates feminine agency from the socio-political realm to a mythic and symbolic dimension, positioning the Goddess as a mediator between human and nonhuman worlds.

Such a transformation exemplifies Lawrence Venuti's concept of domestication, where the translation adapts the source text to resonate with the cultural expectations of the target audience (Venuti 20). At the same time, it reflects a reconfiguration of feminist agency that aligns with postcolonial critiques of Western rationalism, emphasizing relationality, spirituality, and ecological interconnectedness. From a theoretical perspective, this shift can be seen as an instance of ideological mediation, where translation not only transfers meaning but also reshapes the interpretive framework through which gender is understood.

In this context, translation becomes a site where different models of feminine power—institutional, professional, and mythic—are negotiated and rearticulated. By moving from the material agency of characters like Nilima and

Piya to the symbolic authority of the Goddess, the French translation expands the scope of feminist representation while simultaneously transforming its ideological grounding. This dynamic underscores the central argument of this study: that translation actively participates in the reconfiguration of gendered meanings within global literary circulation.

6. CASTE, CLASS, AND LINGUISTIC HIERARCHIES

Translating Subaltern Identity: Caste Across Cultural Contexts

The translation of caste and class in *Gun Island* and its French version *La Déesse et le Marchand* foregrounds the complexities of rendering culturally specific hierarchies across linguistic systems. Caste, as a deeply embedded socio-historical structure in South Asia, does not have a direct equivalent in European contexts. Consequently, translation must negotiate between preserving alterity and ensuring intelligibility. This section examines how subaltern identity is linguistically mediated, demonstrating that translation not only transfers but also reframes social hierarchies. Such processes align with Antoine Berman's notion of the "trial of the foreign," where translation risks either preserving or deforming cultural specificity (Berman 278), and with Lawrence Venuti's argument that translation strategies shape the visibility of cultural difference (Venuti 19).

6.1 Dalit Identity and the Language of Exclusion

The representation of Dalit identity in *Gun Island* is central to its critique of caste-based exclusion. The retention of the term "Dalit" in the French translation signals an attempt to preserve its socio-political specificity, resisting full assimilation into the target culture. As Ranajit Guha emphasizes, subaltern identities are historically marginalized within dominant discourses, making their linguistic representation crucial to any attempt at recovery (Guha xii). By maintaining the term "Dalit," the translation acknowledges its untranslatability and its embeddedness in a specific cultural and historical context.

However, shifts occur in the translation of caste-based insults. The English phrase "only servants and whores" becomes "*seuls les domestiques et les prostituées*." While semantically equivalent, the French version replaces the raw, colloquial force of "whores" with the more formal *prostituées*. This transformation reflects what Berman describes as "ennoblement," a tendency to elevate the stylistic register of the text (Berman 279). The result is a subtle shift in tone, where the violence of caste-based language is moderated, potentially altering its affective impact. From a translation ethics perspective, this raises questions about the extent to which linguistic smoothing may obscure the harsh realities of subaltern experience.

6.2 From "Patrician" to "Aristocratic": Recasting Class Markers

Class distinctions in *Gun Island* are often articulated through linguistic markers, particularly in the contrast between elite and subaltern speech. The description of Nilima's English as reflecting a "patrician upbringing" encodes a specific socio-cultural context tied to colonial and postcolonial elite formations. In the French translation, this becomes "*éducation aristocratique*," a term that resonates with European historical hierarchies.

This shift illustrates how translation adapts culturally specific class markers to target-language frameworks, enabling comprehension while simultaneously transforming meaning. As Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, the translation of non-Western concepts into European categories often involves a process of "provincializing" difference, where local specificities are reinterpreted through dominant epistemologies (Chakrabarty 16). In this case, the move from "patrician" to *aristocratique* repositions class identity within a European sociological imaginary, thereby altering its historical connotations.

Henri Meschonnic's emphasis on discourse and subjectivity further illuminates this shift. For Meschonnic, meaning emerges from the interaction between language and cultural context, and translation inevitably reconfigures this relationship (Meschonnic 45). The recasting of class markers thus reflects not only a linguistic substitution but also a broader cultural reinterpretation of hierarchy.

6.3 Register, Tone, and the Politics of Representation

Beyond individual lexical choices, the translation of caste and class is shaped by broader shifts in register and tone. The English text employs a range of registers from colloquial speech to formal narration to reflect the stratification of social identities. In translation, these variations are often normalized, resulting in a more consistent and formalized tone.

This process aligns with what Berman identifies as "rationalization" and "clarification," where the translation imposes a more orderly and explicit structure on the text (Berman 278). While such tendencies enhance readability, they may also reduce the heterogeneity of voices that characterize the original. From the perspective of subaltern studies, this raises concerns about the potential erasure of linguistic difference, which is integral to the representation of marginalized identities (Spivak 179).

At the same time, Venuti's concept of domestication helps explain how these shifts reflect the expectations of the target audience, prioritizing fluency and coherence over the preservation of foreignness (Venuti 20). The resulting text, while accessible, may reframe the politics of representation by aligning subaltern voices with the norms of the target language.

In this context, translation emerges as a site of negotiation, where caste and class are not simply reproduced but reinterpreted through linguistic and cultural mediation. The transformation of register, tone, and terminology

demonstrates that translation plays an active role in shaping how social hierarchies are understood, highlighting its significance in the global circulation of postcolonial narratives.

7. ECOLOGICAL DISPLACEMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Climate Crisis, Migration, and the Ethics of Representation

Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* situates ecological crisis at the center of contemporary postcolonial experience, linking climate change to migration, labor precarity, and global inequality. Its French translation, *La Déesse et le Marchand*, retains this thematic core while subtly reframing the language of displacement and environmental justice. This section examines how ecological displacement is represented across the two texts, demonstrating that translation mediates not only environmental discourse but also its ethical and political implications. Drawing on ecocritical and translation studies perspectives, the analysis highlights how linguistic choices shape the representation of climate-induced migration and its intersection with social justice (Nixon 2; Venuti 20).

7.1 Cyclone Aila and the Language of Displacement

Cyclone Aila functions as a pivotal event in *Gun Island*, symbolizing the material realities of climate change in the Sundarbans. The English text describes how the sea “invaded places where it had never entered before,” rendering land infertile and displacing entire communities. This language emphasizes both the violence and irreversibility of ecological transformation, aligning with Rob Nixon's concept of “slow violence,” where environmental degradation unfolds gradually yet devastatingly (Nixon 2).

In the French translation, displacement is rendered through expressions such as “*arrachés à leurs villages*” and land described as “*gorgé de sel*.” These choices intensify the affective dimension of displacement, foregrounding the emotional rupture experienced by affected communities. However, this shift also reflects a modulation of tone, where the political urgency of environmental crisis is partially reframed through a more evocative and symbolic register. As Antoine Berman notes, translation often involves processes of “clarification” and “expansion,” which can amplify certain aspects of meaning while altering others (Berman 278). In this case, the translation preserves the reality of ecological displacement but rearticulates its representation through a different stylistic lens.

7.2 Human and Nonhuman Migration

A significant feature of Ghosh's narrative is its emphasis on the interconnected movement of human and nonhuman life forms in response to ecological disruption. The

observation that “even the animals are moving” underscores the collapse of boundaries between human and ecological systems, reflecting a broader critique of anthropocentric frameworks. This perspective resonates with contemporary ecocritical thought, which emphasizes the entanglement of human and nonhuman worlds (Heise 21).

The French translation “*Même les animaux s'en vont*” retains this interconnectedness while slightly shifting the tone toward a more fluid and continuous sense of movement. Henri Meschonnic's emphasis on rhythm and discourse is particularly relevant here, as the translation captures not only semantic meaning but also the cadence of ecological transformation (Meschonnic 45). The result is a representation of migration that is both material and symbolic, reinforcing the idea that ecological crisis affects all forms of life.

At the same time, the translation participates in what Lawrence Venuti describes as domestication, adapting the discourse of environmental crisis to resonate with the interpretive frameworks of the target audience (Venuti 20). While the core idea of interconnected migration is preserved, its articulation is subtly aligned with broader, more universal ecological narratives.

7.3 The Blue Boat: Symbol of Global Inequality

The image of the Blue Boat serves as a powerful symbol of the convergence of ecological crisis, migration, and global inequality. In the English text, the boat represents the human consequences of climate change and the failures of political and economic systems, embodying what Ghosh describes as a “general crisis” of the modern world. The narrative frames the rescue of the boat as a moment where humanitarian ethics override state authority, emphasizing the moral imperative to address displacement.

In the French translation, the symbolic function of the Blue Boat is preserved, but its representation is inflected through a slightly different tonal register. The emphasis shifts toward the universality of the crisis, highlighting the shared vulnerability of displaced populations. This transformation aligns with Berman's notion of “universalization,” where culturally specific phenomena are rendered in more general terms (Berman 279). While this broadens the accessibility of the narrative, it may also attenuate the specificity of the socio-political critique embedded in the original.

From a theoretical perspective, the Blue Boat encapsulates the ethical stakes of translation as a form of representation. As Spivak argues, the translation of marginalized experiences must remain attentive to the singularity of those experiences, resisting the tendency to subsume them under universal categories (Spivak 179). The French translation navigates this tension by preserving the symbolic weight of the Blue Boat while rearticulating its meaning within a global framework.

Overall, the comparative analysis demonstrates that ecological displacement in translation is not merely reproduced but reinterpreted through shifts in language, tone, and narrative emphasis. These transformations underscore the role of translation as a site of ethical and ideological mediation, shaping how environmental justice is understood within global literary circulation.

8. COLONIAL POWER AND ITS REVERSAL

From Colonial Surveillance to Migrant Agency

Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* interrogates the historical continuities between colonial systems of control and contemporary regimes of migration, surveillance, and global capitalism. Its French translation, *La Déesse et le Marchand*, retains this critical framework while subtly mediating its linguistic and ideological articulation. This section examines how colonial power is represented and reconfigured across the two texts, focusing on the transformation from colonial surveillance to migrant agency. Drawing on postcolonial theory and translation studies, the analysis highlights how translation reshapes the representation of power, knowledge, and resistance (Said 25; Venuti 20).

8.1 The Linguistic Journey of “Bundook”

The term *bundook* (gun) serves as a central linguistic and symbolic motif in *Gun Island*, encapsulating the entangled histories of language, trade, and colonial expansion. The narrative traces the word's etymology from Arabic *al-Bunduqeyya* (Venice) into South Asian usage through colonial encounters, illustrating how language itself becomes a repository of historical movement and cultural exchange. This linguistic journey reflects what Edward Said identifies as the circulation of knowledge within imperial systems, where language functions as a tool of both domination and hybridity (Said 25).

In the French translation, the term is retained and contextualized through references to “*pratiques coloniales britanniques*,” preserving its historical significance while adapting its explanatory framework for a Francophone readership. This strategy aligns with Antoine Berman's advocacy for preserving the foreignness of the text, allowing culturally specific terms to remain visible within translation (Berman 278). At the same time, the explanatory framing introduces an element of clarification, making the term more accessible but also slightly reorienting its interpretive emphasis. The linguistic trajectory of *bundook* thus exemplifies how translation negotiates between historical specificity and cultural intelligibility.

8.2 Reversal of the Colonial Gaze

A key postcolonial insight in *Gun Island* is the reversal of the colonial gaze. During the colonial period, European powers exercised control through detailed documentation of colonized populations, recording their identities,

movements, and labor. In the contemporary context, this dynamic is inverted: migrants from the Global South possess detailed knowledge of Western legal systems, borders, and bureaucratic processes, while remaining largely invisible within dominant narratives.

This reversal reflects what Dipesh Chakrabarty describes as the destabilization of Eurocentric epistemologies, where formerly marginalized subjects assert agency within global systems (Chakrabarty 16). The narrative emphasizes how migrants use digital technologies to navigate borders, transforming tools of control into instruments of mobility. In translation, this dynamic is preserved, but its articulation is subtly modulated to align with broader discourses of globalization and migration.

From a translation studies perspective, this shift illustrates Lawrence Venuti's concept of domestication, where the foreign text is adapted to the interpretive frameworks of the target culture (Venuti 20). While the critique of colonial power remains intact, the emphasis shifts toward a more universalized understanding of migration, potentially attenuating the specificity of the postcolonial reversal. Nevertheless, the translation maintains the central idea that power is no longer unidirectional but subject to negotiation and transformation.

8.3 Translating Capitalism: From “Industry” to “Sector”

The representation of global capitalism in *Gun Island* is closely tied to the commodification of human movement, described in the English text as the “people-moving industry.” This phrase foregrounds the exploitative and systemic nature of migration networks, emphasizing their integration into global capitalist structures. The term “industry” carries connotations of profit, mechanization, and large-scale organization, highlighting the dehumanization inherent in these processes.

In the French translation, this phrase becomes “*le secteur de la migration*,” a shift that significantly alters its tonal and ideological implications. The term *secteur* suggests a more neutral, bureaucratic framework, aligning with administrative or economic classifications rather than explicitly foregrounding exploitation. This transformation can be understood through Berman's concept of “rationalization,” where translation introduces a more structured and formalized expression (Berman 278). While this enhances clarity, it also moderates the critical edge of the original.

From a broader theoretical perspective, this shift reflects how translation participates in the rearticulation of economic discourse. As Venuti argues, translation is always embedded within cultural and ideological contexts that shape how meaning is produced and received (Venuti 19). The movement from “industry” to *secteur* exemplifies how translation can recalibrate the representation of capitalism, transforming a morally charged critique into a more neutral description.

Overall, the comparative analysis reveals that translation plays a crucial role in mediating representations of colonial power and its contemporary transformations. By tracing the linguistic journey of *bundook*, the reversal of the colonial gaze, and the translation of capitalist terminology, this section demonstrates that translation not only conveys but also reshapes the dynamics of power, knowledge, and resistance within global literary circulation.

9. TRANSLATION AS CULTURAL MEDIATION

Rewriting Meaning: Ideology, Language, and Global Circulation

This section synthesizes the preceding analyses to argue that translation operates as a form of cultural mediation that actively rewrites meaning within global literary circulation. Rather than functioning as a neutral conduit, translation participates in the production of ideological meaning by reshaping how narratives of gender, caste, ecology, and colonial power are interpreted in new linguistic contexts. Drawing on translation theory, this section demonstrates how both macro-level transformations such as title shifts and micro-level linguistic choices contribute to the reconfiguration of postcolonial discourse. As Lawrence Venuti argues, translation is inherently an act of rewriting that reflects the cultural and ideological conditions of the target context (Venuti 19). Similarly, Antoine Berman emphasizes that translation inevitably transforms the foreign text, raising ethical questions about the preservation of alterity (Berman 278).

9.1 Title Transformation and Narrative Reorientation

The most striking instance of translation as cultural mediation is the transformation of the title from *Gun Island* to *La Déesse et le Marchand*. The original title foregrounds a linguistic and historical enigma centered on the word *bundook*, encapsulating themes of colonial circulation, hybridity, and epistemological inquiry. It directs the reader toward a narrative driven by etymology, migration, and the entanglement of language and history.

In contrast, the French title reorients the narrative toward a relational and symbolic framework, foregrounding the Goddess (Manasa Devi) and the Merchant as central figures. This shift exemplifies what Gideon Toury describes as the influence of target-culture norms, where translation adapts textual elements to align with the expectations and interpretive frameworks of the receiving audience (Toury 56). The emphasis on mythic figures resonates with broader European literary traditions that privilege allegory and symbolic conflict.

From a theoretical perspective, this transformation can be understood as an instance of domestication, where the translation reshapes the narrative to enhance accessibility and cultural resonance (Venuti 20). At the same time, it reflects a deeper ideological shift: the movement from a linguistic and postcolonial investigation toward a

cosmological and relational interpretation of the text. As Henri Meschonnic argues, translation is not merely the transfer of meaning but the reconfiguration of discourse, including its ethical and poetic dimensions (Meschonnic 45). The title change thus redefines the interpretive horizon of the narrative, influencing how readers engage with its themes of gender, ecology, and justice.

9.2 Micro-Linguistic Shifts and Macro-Ideological Effects

Beyond the title, the translation introduces a series of micro-linguistic shifts that collectively produce significant ideological effects. These include changes in lexical choice, register, and tone, which subtly reshape the representation of social hierarchies and power relations. For instance, the translation of “people-moving industry” as “*le secteur de la migration*” transforms a morally charged critique of capitalist exploitation into a more neutral, bureaucratic expression. This shift illustrates how language can modulate the intensity of social critique, aligning with Berman’s notion of “rationalization,” where translation imposes a more orderly and formal structure on the text (Berman 278).

Similarly, the rendering of caste-based insults and class markers reflects a tendency toward stylistic normalization. The movement from colloquial or emotionally charged expressions in English to more formalized equivalents in French demonstrates how translation can recalibrate tone and affect. Such changes are not merely stylistic but carry ideological implications, influencing how readers perceive the severity of social injustice.

These micro-level transformations exemplify what Venuti describes as the “invisibility” of the translator, where the fluency of the translated text masks the interpretive interventions underlying it (Venuti 1). By producing a text that reads naturally within the target language, translation may obscure the cultural and political specificity of the original. At the same time, these shifts reflect the operation of translation norms, as theorized by Toury, which guide the selection of linguistic forms within a given cultural system (Toury 57).

9.3 Preservation, Transformation, and Interpretive Agency

The interplay between preservation and transformation is central to understanding translation as cultural mediation. While the French translation retains key thematic elements of *Gun Island* including its focus on migration, ecological crisis, and subaltern identity it simultaneously reinterprets these themes through shifts in language and narrative framing. This dynamic underscores the role of the translator as an interpretive agent who negotiates between the source text and the target culture.

Spivak’s notion of translation as an ethical encounter is particularly relevant here. She argues that the translator must engage with the “rhetoricity” of the original,

preserving its complexity while remaining attentive to cultural difference (Spivak 179). However, as this analysis demonstrates, such preservation is always partial, as translation inevitably involves transformation. The French translation navigates this tension by maintaining certain elements of alterity such as culturally specific terms while adapting others to align with the expectations of its readership.

French translation theorists further illuminate this process. Meschonnic's emphasis on the inseparability of language and subjectivity highlights how translation reshapes not only meaning but also the voice and rhythm of the text (Meschonnic 45). In this sense, translation is a creative act that produces a new textual entity, rather than a replica of the original. Berman's call for an "ethical translation" that resists ethnocentric deformation remains an ideal, yet the practical realities of translation often involve negotiation and compromise (Berman 278).

Ultimately, this section demonstrates that translation functions as a site of ideological mediation, where meanings are continuously rewritten in response to cultural, linguistic, and institutional pressures. The movement from *Gun Island* to *La Déesse et le Marchand* exemplifies how translation participates in the global circulation of postcolonial narratives, not by simply transmitting them but by transforming their interpretive frameworks. This underscores the central argument of the article: that translation is an active and dynamic process that reshapes the meanings of gender, caste, and social justice within transnational literary contexts.

10. DISCUSSION

Translation, Power, and the Reconfiguration of Social Justice

The preceding analyses demonstrate that translation operates not as a neutral mechanism of linguistic transfer but as a dynamic site of power where meanings of social justice are actively reconfigured. By examining Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* alongside its French translation *La Déesse et le Marchand*, this study reveals that translation reshapes how gender, caste, ecological displacement, and colonial power are articulated within global literary circulation. This section synthesizes these findings to argue that translation functions as an ideological practice embedded within broader structures of cultural authority, interpretive frameworks, and epistemological hierarchies.

At the core of this argument lies the recognition that translation is inseparable from power. As Lawrence Venuti contends, translation is always conditioned by the cultural values and institutional norms of the target language, which determine what is made visible or invisible in the translated text (Venuti 19). In the case of *La Déesse et le Marchand*, the shift in narrative emphasis from linguistic and postcolonial inquiry to mythic and relational frameworks reflects not only aesthetic choices but also the expectations of a Francophone readership. This transformation underscores the role of translation in

mediating between different cultural imaginaries, where meanings are adapted to align with dominant interpretive paradigms.

One of the most significant implications of this mediation is the reconfiguration of gendered agency. While the English text foregrounds women as agents of institutional resistance and scientific authority, the French translation introduces a symbolic and mythic dimension that reframes feminine power. This shift does not erase female agency but transforms its ideological grounding, moving from material forms of resistance to more relational and cosmological representations. From a postcolonial feminist perspective, this transformation raises critical questions about the translation of gendered subjectivity across cultural contexts. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues, translation must remain attentive to the specificity of subaltern women's experiences, resisting the tendency to universalize or appropriate their voices (Spivak 179). The French translation navigates this tension by preserving key elements of agency while rearticulating them within a different symbolic framework, illustrating the complexities of translating feminist discourse.

Similarly, the translation of caste and class reveals how linguistic choices can reshape the representation of social hierarchies. The retention of terms such as "Dalit" suggests an effort to preserve cultural specificity, yet shifts in register and tone such as the movement from colloquial to more formal expressions indicate a process of normalization. Antoine Berman's concept of "ennoblement" is particularly relevant here, as it describes the tendency of translation to elevate or refine the stylistic register of the text (Berman 279). While such transformations may enhance readability, they also risk attenuating the immediacy and affective force of caste-based discrimination. This highlights the tension between intelligibility and alterity, a central concern in translation studies, where the desire for fluency may come at the cost of preserving linguistic and cultural difference.

The representation of ecological displacement further illustrates how translation mediates the ethics of social justice. In *Gun Island*, climate change is depicted as a politically charged phenomenon, closely linked to histories of colonial exploitation and contemporary capitalist systems. The French translation retains this thematic focus but often reframes it through a more universalized and symbolic discourse. This shift aligns with what Rob Nixon terms the challenge of representing "slow violence," where environmental harm is dispersed across time and space, making it difficult to capture within conventional narrative forms (Nixon 2). Translation, in this context, becomes a means of rearticulating environmental crisis for different audiences, potentially broadening its accessibility while also reshaping its political implications.

The transformation of economic discourse, particularly in the translation of terms related to migration and labor, further underscores the ideological dimensions of translation. The shift from "people-moving industry" to

“secteur de la migration” exemplifies how translation can recalibrate the representation of capitalism, moving from a critical, morally charged perspective to a more neutral, bureaucratic framing. This transformation reflects what Venuti describes as domestication, where translation aligns the text with the norms and expectations of the target culture (Venuti 20). At the same time, it raises important questions about the extent to which translation can sustain the critical edge of the source text, particularly when dealing with issues of exploitation and inequality.

The concept of the “reversal of the colonial gaze” provides a crucial lens through which to understand these transformations. In *Gun Island*, this reversal is articulated through the agency of migrants who navigate and subvert global systems of control. As Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, such dynamics challenge the epistemological dominance of Western frameworks, highlighting the need to rethink the relationship between knowledge, power, and representation (Chakrabarty 16). In translation, however, this reversal is mediated through linguistic and cultural adjustments that may reframe its significance. While the French translation preserves the idea of migrant agency, its articulation is often aligned with broader narratives of globalization, potentially diluting the specificity of the postcolonial critique.

From a theoretical standpoint, these findings support the view that translation is a form of rewriting that participates in the production of knowledge. As André Lefevere argues, translations are shaped by ideological and poetics-driven constraints, which determine how texts are adapted within new cultural systems (Lefevere 8). This perspective reinforces the idea that translation is not merely a secondary activity but a central component of literary and cultural production. By rewriting narratives of social justice, translation contributes to the formation of global discourses, influencing how issues such as gender inequality, caste discrimination, and environmental crisis are understood and represented.

French translation theory further enriches this discussion by emphasizing the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of translation. Henri Meschonnic's insistence on the inseparability of language, subjectivity, and rhythm highlights how translation transforms not only meaning but also the voice and experience of the text (Meschonnic 45). This perspective underscores the creative and interpretive nature of translation, positioning it as an act that generates new meanings rather than simply reproducing existing ones. Similarly, Berman's call for an “ethical translation” that respects the foreignness of the text remains a critical benchmark, even as the practical realities of translation involve negotiation and compromise (Berman 278).

Ultimately, this discussion demonstrates that translation is a site where power, ideology, and representation intersect. The movement from *Gun Island* to *La Déesse et le Marchand* illustrates how translation reshapes the meanings of social justice, producing new configurations of gender, caste, and ecological discourse within global

literary circulation. These transformations do not simply reflect differences between languages but reveal the complex processes through which knowledge is mediated, contested, and rearticulated across cultural boundaries. In this sense, translation emerges as a critical tool for understanding the dynamics of power in a globalized world, where the circulation of texts is inseparable from the circulation of ideas and ideologies.

11. CONCLUSION

This study has argued that translation is not a neutral or secondary act of linguistic transfer but a dynamic site of ideological mediation that actively reshapes meanings within global literary circulation. Through a comparative analysis of Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island* and its French translation *La Déesse et le Marchand*, the paper has demonstrated how translation reconfigures key dimensions of social justice gender, caste, ecological displacement, and colonial power across linguistic and cultural contexts. The findings collectively point toward the need for a more nuanced theoretical understanding of translation as a transformative practice that participates in the production of knowledge and the redistribution of meaning.

At the level of gender, the study has shown that while the English text foregrounds women as agents of institutional and professional resistance, the French translation introduces a shift toward symbolic and mythic representations of feminine power. This transformation does not negate female agency but reframes it within a different cultural and narrative logic, highlighting how translation can expand, redirect, or recalibrate feminist discourse. Similarly, the analysis of caste and class has revealed that although certain culturally specific terms such as “Dalit” are retained, shifts in register, tone, and lexical choice recontextualize social hierarchies within a European sociolinguistic framework. These changes underscore the tension between preserving alterity and ensuring intelligibility, a central challenge in the translation of postcolonial texts.

The examination of ecological displacement further illustrates how translation mediates the ethics of representation. While the French translation preserves the thematic focus on climate crisis and migration, it often reframes these issues through a more universalized and symbolic discourse. This shift broadens the accessibility of the narrative but also risks attenuating its political specificity, particularly in relation to the historical and structural dimensions of environmental injustice. Likewise, the translation of economic and colonial terminology demonstrates how subtle linguistic choices can recalibrate ideological emphasis, transforming critical representations of exploitation into more neutral or bureaucratic formulations.

Taken together, these findings support the central claim that translation functions as an active agent in the rearticulation of social justice narratives. Rather than merely transmitting meaning, translation produces new

interpretive possibilities, shaped by the cultural, institutional, and ideological contexts of the target language. This process involves continuous negotiation between preservation and transformation, where the translator navigates competing demands of fidelity, readability, and cultural resonance. In this sense, translation emerges as a form of rewriting that participates in the circulation of ideas, influencing how global audiences understand and engage with issues of inequality, displacement, and resistance.

The concept of translation as ideological mediation proposed in this study offers a theoretical framework for understanding these dynamics. It emphasizes that translation is embedded within structures of power and knowledge, where linguistic choices carry ethical and political implications. By foregrounding the interpretive agency of the translator, this framework moves beyond reductive binaries of equivalence and loss, highlighting instead the productive and generative nature of translation. It also invites further research into how different languages and cultural contexts shape the reception and transformation of postcolonial narratives, particularly in relation to emerging global challenges such as climate change and migration.

In conclusion, the movement from *Gun Island* to *La Déesse et le Marchand* exemplifies how translation participates in the global reconfiguration of meaning. It demonstrates that translation is not simply a bridge between languages but a site where meanings are contested, negotiated, and reimagined. Recognizing translation as ideological mediation allows for a deeper understanding of its role in shaping contemporary literary and cultural discourse, affirming its significance in the ongoing dialogue between local specificity and global circulation.

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