Translating Ramayana: Plurilingual to pluricultural

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Abstract

Embedded contexts and improvisations in bhasha Ramayanas with its nuances of plurality attribute to its influences of respective linguistic and culture of multinational and multicultural countries: Ram-story of Ramayana, considered primarily a work of smriti , has travelled a long journey in the land of multilingual and heterogeneous cultural spheres. Indian bhashas – Assamese, Thamizh, Malayalam, Oriya, Bengali, and so on – have rendered Rama-katha within the very Indian society under different paradigms which have overshadowed the original, i.e. Valmiki's Ramayana in Sanskrit. In lieu of assimilation of original text in another language that relevant translation promotes, bhasha Ramayanas presents different renderings or retellings , instead of variants or versions of Valmiki, colored with heterogeneous cultural ethos. Discussing three bhasha Ramayana(s) – 12th century Kampar's Ramavataram in Thamizh , 15th century Krttivasi Ramayana or Sriram Pacali in Bengali, and 16th century Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas in Awadhi – this essay explores social and literary function of translation strategies in its poly-lingual and multinational world. Questioning the idea of original and relevant Ramayana, it also reflects on how bhasha Ramayanas co-exist in multilingual and multicultural society with its distinguished autonomy and differences. The tripartite comparative project of this article critically investigates their structures, sequential arrangements, bhasha cultural color, and story overlaps. It also calls attention to coalescence of Rama-story through plurilingual renderings with respect to its pluricultural valences in South Asia. Focusing on the polyvalences, it also argues that such retellings problematize the relevance of a genuine translation by questioning translational canonical principles for bhasha texts.

Keywords: pluralism; retelling; translation; bhasha; Ramayana

Vishwakarma. Exchanges 2024 11(2), pp. 133-160

133

Indian Cultural Pluralism and bhasha Ramayanas*i*

Indian literature with growing debates between literatures in *margi* (Sanskrit, now English) and *bhashaii* (Indian language) is discussed on grounds of its appeals to Indian sensitivity and Indian consciousness which often addresses complexities of nationalism. Plurality of India is indeed embedded with its multilingual and multicultural prosperity with no possible single nationalism of the nation. Indian plurality can be construed in various contexts such as of religion, community, culture, literature, and language. John Strachey once made a staunch remark about Indian pluralism saying, 'that there is not, and never was an India, or even any country of India, possessing, according to European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political, social, or religious' (**qtd. in Embree 1972, 45**). Embree (**1972**) construing his implications said, 'India possessed none of the qualities of [single] nationality that resembled those of classic examples….Common language, a proudly shared historic experience, common religious traditions, internal political unity, racial homogeneity, a widely shared cultural experience, all of these conspicuously lacking in India' (**Ibid: 45**). Shormishtha Panja (**1999**), in her book *Many Indias, Many Literatures*, affirms plurality of Indian literatures with insistence on retaining pluricultural and plurilingual nuances by translating *bhasha* literatures into English. One of her most significant claims to retain plurality of India literatures is 'to contextualize, in effect to translate and mediate regional cultures, to supply footnotes for the multitude of languages and for all regional heritage' (**Anamika 190**). In similar terrain, Amartya Sen (**1993**) has also spoken of Indian pluralism at Indian International Centre by emphasizing its practice in India and religious diversity in his opinion is only a part of Indian pluralism. The practice of Indian pluralism promotes tolerance of heterogeneity and produces culturally rich society (**Ibid: 46**). Plurality of Indian literatures as discussed here calls attention to translation of regional or *bhasha* or more appropriately *bhasha* literatures not only to expand the readability of Indian cultural plurality but also to regionalize or '*bhasha*ize' master language like English and bringing Indian English, i.e. regional or Indian dialect of English. Makarand Paranjape (**2009**) distinctly argues for the inadequacy of centre-periphery model (*margi-bhasha* / English or Sanskrit-Indian *bhasha* languages / domination-subordination) and calls attention to multiplicity.

> At the least we need to theorize multiple centres and multiple peripheries in order to account for the cultural exchanges today….using languages as locations is one way of reframing the centre-periphery dialectic….the way out of…reinforced binary of domination-subordination is to use *translation* and multilingualism as strategies to promote cultural difference and counter cross-cultural inequalities. (**Paranjape, 2009: 98**)

Translation and multilingualism are better embodied as strategies to promote cultural differences and cross-cultural transactions and this eventually leads one social group to negotiate single nation with its multinational identity. The text of *Ramayana* is no single text; it is multifaceted and multi-represented that has been appropriated and re-appropriated by different cultural groups within India but also elsewhere in South Asia.

Multilingual *Ramayanas* call attention to interaction between cultural pluralism on the one hand and national integration on the other. It is important here to understand that multilingual and culturally plural countries are liable to galvanize national conflict and '*ethnohegemonies*' (**Peleg, 2007**). Although majority and minority hegemonic system are often seen in constant cross conflicts for affirmation of their cultural and national identities; pluralism allows people to 'value social diversity that in fact exists, and to use it in a way that balances social and individual needs' (**Wollenberg et al., 2005, 9**). Cultural pluralism enables 'individuals or groups to maintain their autonomy and still function as members of a larger society' by its attempt to 'achieve cooperation where there are differences' (**Ibid**). *Ramayana* in various lingual and cultural forms appeals to religious, cultural, and Indian consciousness despite being disseminated in other South Asian countries and it is therefore never cumulative but transnational. *Bhasha Ramayanas* therefore are not versions but as Ramanujan (**1997**) called it— 'retellings' that represent subversion in terms of cultural and linguistic transactions through cross cultural and regional interaction beyond Indian locations. If cultural and racial plurality of US is insinuated by metaphor of 'melting-pot', India is cultural 'mosaic' (**Guha, 1997**) or more appropriately as a 'salad bowl' where different social groups with its respective cultural and linguistic diversity co-exist in the larger social hierarchy. This might lead to distinctive multivalent cultural diversity of Indian society but it never curtails the hegemonic hierarchies rather it reaffirms and relocates these hegemonies in new discourses. *Ramayana* as the basis of Indian culture creates discourses in every diverse culture of the country with its idiosyncratic social milieus of different social groups. Therefore, the *bhasha Ramayanas* are not just translations but retellings breaking the center-peripheries and creating new discourses for multivalent Indian cultures and literatures by appealing to Indian

consciousness and local sensibilities. They are the foundational for creation of regional Indian literatures with its distinct identities literary discourses.

> Indian literature, and by extension, India and 'Indianness,' belong to a different dimension than the mere accumulation of texts and tongues. It is somewhat akin to how a translated text is neither original, nor an entirely new text, but a different kind of text, a trans-text....Translation is, of course, central to my argument…. Indian literature is thus not just a literature, but a trans-literature and that Indian culture is not just a culture, but a trans-culture. (**Paranjape, 2009: 99**)

Bhasha Ramayanas construct regional literary discourses, they are not mere translation but retellings, multifaceted representations, or what Paranjape called 'trans-texts' that represent regional and local sensibilities by insinuating Indian consciousness. They call attention to threefold-trans that is transformational-transferential-travail. Through these trans-texts of *bhasha Ramayanas*, the Ram-story travels, gets transformed, and culturally transacted. Multilingualism in India, making it heterogeneous in nature and culture, has contributed to translation by venerating individual-indigenous culture and by creating a reciprocal relation among linguistic diversity of the nation; subsequently, *bhasha* literature and the respective discourses represent the immense influence of plurlinguality. This 'translating consciousness', says Ganesh Devy (**1999**), 'shifts significance from a given verbal form to a corresponding but different verbal form' creating 'openness of language systems' (**Ibid: 185**); however, *bhasha Ramayanas* are not translation but retellings that confirm the rise of modern Indian languages or *bhasha* and therefore multilingualism, using Harish Trivedi's phrase, is not 'conducive to translation' (**2006, 2014: 104**). *Ramayana* has emerged not only in different Indian *bhasha*s and oral forms but also across India in Southeast Asian cultures – Tibet, Thailand, Burma, Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia, Java, and Indonesia. *Bhasha Ramayanas* exploit only *Ramakatha* – phrase to refer to Rama's narrative – in different languages and respective cultures creating a space for its people; the focus is not expanding or experimenting *Ramakatha* but retelling of Ramakatha to expand its audience in different languages and in different cultures. They create a new world for them and challenge the *ur*-text without going against it; Jiddu Krishnamurti's reflection on freedom connects the call for freedom from the authority of the original.

> Freedom implies the complete cessation of all inward authority. From that quality of mind comes an outward freedom – something which is entirely different from the reaction of opposing or resisting. (**Krishnamurti, 1998: 124**)

Bhasha Ramayanas, indeed, calls attention to this 'outward freedom' from 'inward authority' of *ur*-text or original Sanskrit[iii]; the outward freedom, releasing them from Sanskrit, enables them to sensitize readers or spectators from different sides of the text by creating a close link between the raised issues and its function in the social world. For instance, they sensitize its audience with some of the crucial aspects prevalent in a society such as subordination of femininity, rise of female voice, marginalization of one caste by another, politics of power, familial violence, and motherhood; disrupting the Sanskrit text, they present the subverted life of Rama, Ravana, and Sita. Vimalasuri's Jain *Ramayana* and the Thai *Ramakein* focuses on the narratives of Ravana (a demon) while Kannada village telling in oral form focuses on the life of Sita – her birth, trials, social commodification, and subsequent resistance (**Ramanujan, 1999**); coloring the *ur*-text, they represent marginalization of a low-caste, the struggle of Rakshas or demons, and suppression of female voice in the Valmiki *Ramayana*.

More than a thousand *Ramayanas* have been found by different scholars of the *Ramayana* in Indian *bhasha*s and other languages which execute only a shallow relation with the Sanskrit *Ramayana*. Camille Bulcke (1950) is supposed to find around one thousand *Ramayanas* in Kannada only (**Ramanujan, 1999**). The Indian *bhasha* renderings, retelling *Ramakatha* present their peculiar linguistic and cultural aspects that function to strengthen their socio-cultural idiosyncrasies and their peculiar cultural variation in society. Written in Indo-Aryan, Dravadian, and Indo-Tibetan languages, the *bhasha* renderings expanded their communal audience by strengthening their cultural identities calling attention to plurality of *Ramayanas* in India. Kampar's *Iramavataram* in Tamil, Reddy's *Ranganathan Ramayana* in Telugu, *Saptakanda Ramayana* in Assamese, *Vilanka Ramayana* and *Jagomohan Ramayana* in Oriya, *Adhyatm Ramayanam*[iv] and *Ramacharitam*[v] in Malayalam, *Krittivasi Ramayana* in Bengali, *Sri Ramacharitmans* in Awadhi, and *Sri Ramayana Darshanam* in Kannada are some of the illustration of Indian *bhasha Ramayanas*. In pre-fourteenth century Tamil literature, Ramakatha has been found; two Tamilian epics *Cilappatikaram* and *Maniekalai* also present Rama-story differently. Periyalavar, 8th century Alvar poet, appears to have written verses on meeting of Hanuman and Sita in Ashokavana and the first Malayalam *Ramayana* begins with this episode (**Menon, 1991**). The *Ramayana* in Buddhist and Jain discourses also present different narratives of the characters; for instance *Dasarath Jataka* presents Dasharath as the king of Benaras not of Ayodhya. The classical religious Rama story is presented as belonging to the tradition of Theraveda Buddhism (**Reynolds, 1991**). This first telling, Buddhist *Dasarath Jataka*, presents Rama-Pandit, Lakshman, and Sita as siblings and children of king

Dasharath of Benaras who sends them in exile because he fears his second wife, with the demand her son to be the king, could harm his first three children (**Gombrich, 1985; Reynolds, 1991**). The earlier retelling of Ram-story in Buddhist Jataka presents him as a *bodhisattva* in *Anamaka Jataka* or Great Being as *mahatto* or erstwhile incarnation of Lord Buddha. The narrative of Sita as his sister (*kanittha bhagini*) and wife (*agga-mahesi*) emphasizes the significance of retention of purity in ruling lineages of *kshatriya* clans like the Shakyas and the Lichchhavis found in early Pali texts as well as in ruling class of *gana-rajyas* of 6th century BC. 'Interpreting these myths in terms of 'incestuous' relationship', says Suvira Jaiswal (**1993**) 'is an anachronistic imposition of social norms of a later period on myths meant to convey a different meaning' (**Ibid: 90**). In later texts, Ram is seen as incarnation, while Valmiki sees him as divine incarnation only in his book I and VII. The *Dasharatha* and *Vessantara Jataka* add *devi* to Sita's name and her association with Ram and Lakhana is linked to worship of the deity, Ekanamasha. With her brothers Baladeva and Krishna, the motif Indianises the narrative, while in every Second Buddhist retelling–Laotian *Phra Lak Phra Lam*, adaptation of *Dasarath Jataka*–it introduces the 'incest' motif by presenting Dhatarattha having Rama, Lak, and Cantha as children. Dhatarattha and Virulaha are children of Parameswara of Indraprasth (Cambodia); Virulaha succeeds his father on Indraprastha kingdom while Dhatarattha creates his city of Candrapuri Sri Satta Naga (Vietienne). Ravana, Virulaha's son, abducts his cousin Cantha; after traditionally asking her hands and accepting conditions laid down by Rama, he is ritually married to Cantha (**Sahai, 2011**).

The Jain retelling, oral forms, and Southeast Asia present more subverted narratives of Ramakatha presenting lesser Indian influence; a full-fledged local influence is the hallmark of Jain retelling. In Vimala Suri's *Paumacaryam* written in Prakrit the Rama-story is told by Mahavira himself to Indrabhuti (Akhandalbhuti, the first Ganadhara of Mahavira) and is replete with Jain concepts of origin of civilization, creation, ancient dynasties, and even lives of Tirthankaras (**Chhikara, 2007**). Focusing on Ravana's adventures, it presents him as one of the sixty-three leaders of the Jain tradition who has earned power through austerities and he is not killed by Rama who himself is an 'evolved Jain soul' having conquered his passions (**Ramanujan, 1999**). Vimala Suri's conception of Ravana and vanaras as Vidyadharas takes a subverted departure from the Valmiki telling. The Vidyadar dynasty at Lanka was called as Raksasas after one of their king's name and the Vidyadharas of Kishkindha are known as Vanaras due to their custom of wearing totems on their banners (**Chhikara, 2007**). The Kakawin *Ramayana* or the old Javanese *Ramayana*, the Thai *Ramakien*, and the Malaysian *Hikayat Seri Ram* are the prominent illustrations of Southeast Asian retellings or renderings of Ramakatha. The

Vishwakarma. Exchanges 2024 11(2), pp. 133-160

138

Kakawin Ramayana or old Javanese Ramayana, written in poetic verses, is a transposition of the sixth-seventh century Sanskrit text *Bhattikavya* (*Ravanavadha*) by Bhatti Svami (**Acri, 2010, Zakharyin, 2013**) but closely follows Valmiki excluding his first and last books as shown in bas-reliefs of Prambanan in Central Java (**Desai, 1970**). The depiction of Javanese indigenous deity, *dhayan*, guardian God of Java Semar and his sons' mishappenings creates the Indonesian idiosyncrasies to the narrative; the substitution of Sanskrit with Old Javanese and Kakawin literature confirms a move towards *bhasha* for enhancing their local power (**Acri, 2010**). The Thai *Ramakien* or *Ramakirti* in Sanskrit, written during the reign of king Rama-I – founder of the Chakri dynasty, presents a non-evil personality of Ravana, named as Thosakan and his abduction of Sita is considered an act of love drawing readers' sympathy (**Ramanujan, 1999**). Thai beliefs and myths and folktales, for instance Kok-khanaak – the demon of Lobpuri province, have influenced the Thai *Ramakien* (**Mesangrutdharakul, 2014**).

Oral forms like myths and folk narratives have rendered the Ramakatha in different ways which localize the telling in their regional surrounding. The Kerala shadow puppet play, based on Kampar's *Iramavataram*, the episode of death of Surpanakha's son Sambukumaran is dealt differently from that of Kampar. His death while doing *tapas* for Siva at the hands of Lakshman presents his mother agonized who addresses her aggressive appeal for justice to Siva not to Rama as avtar of Vishnu (**Blackburn, 1991**). Another example is women's folk songs that focus on actions of women characters; Brahmin Telugu-speaking women sing of the marital relations of Sita, her wedding, and pregnancy. The north-Indian songs even refer to new characters not found in the Valmiki, Tulsi, or Kampar such as midwife giving birth to Rama and a deer killed to make a drum for baby Rama (**Richman, 2008**). The motif of Sita as Ravana's daughter is well-known in Ramayana folk tradition and Jain renderings. One of the south Indian folk narratives sung by traditional bards or *tamburi dasayyas* opens with the unhappy couple Ravula (Ravana) and Mandodari; while performing self-mortification, he meets a jogi or mendicant, Siva himself who gives him a magic mango asking of his intention of sharing it with his wife. He answers that he will give his wife the fleshy side of the fruit and will have seed for himself; being skeptical, Siva asks, 'If you lie to me, you'll eat the fruit of your actions yourself'. The bard also refers to his behavior as one in his dreams and another in his wakefulness. With the greed to have his stomach full before his wife, he eats the flesh of fruit giving her only seed. Subsequently, he gets pregnant and a girl is born from his sneeze named as Sitamma because in Kannada, Sita means 'he sneezed' (**Ramanujan 1999: 146-7**). In Sanghadas Gani's Jain Ramayana, Mandodari Ravana's wife gives birth to a daughter who is put in a jewel-box and the minister is asked to desert the box; however, he takes it to the field of Janaka in

Mithila and placing it in front of plough he informs Janaka that a girl is born from furrow (**Shah 2003, 63-4**). Folk tradition, an essential part of Maharashtrian religion, revolves around the cults of eight Ganpatis and of Nine-Naths or *devis* who are essentially Saivites; however, there are instances of Vishnu worship too. Koli, a Maharashtrian tribe, presents Valmiki as their ancestor by transposing the story of Valmiki as robber in the *Adhyatmaramayanam* (**Sontheimer, 1991**). The Brahmin women of Andhra presents completely different telling from that of Valmiki or any other rendering. Their central character is female; one of the songs narrates the Ramayana story as being told by Santa, Rama's elder sister. Besides that, Rama's birth, Kaushalya's pregnancy, Sita's wedding, Sita's puberty, and Lava-Kusa's battle with Rama are represented in the well known folk songs of Andhra (**Rao, 1991**).

There have always been constant debates and contests regarding the idea whether *Ramayana* is a myth or historical text. HD Sankalia, renowned archeologist, has claimed on based on his research and findings (**1982**) that the epic *Ramayana* is supposed to be taken place in between two tribes of Madhya Pradesh. He has found three Lanka in Madhya Pradesh. KN Panikkar once opined, 'Myths are sources of history; at the same time they are not history. By turning myth into history, the historian is bidding goodbye to history' (**qtd. in Tharuvana, 2014: 19**). The debate regarding *Ramayana* and its history was started by HD Sankalia's question in 'How Old Is the Ramayana?' in 1974 in the *Times of India* and he placed the Ram story between 2850 BC and 1950 BC while DC Sircar placed it in between 1000 and 850 AD (**Patil, 1976: 68**). Sankalia, however, in his lectures 'Ramayana: Myth or Reality' (**1972**) proclaim that Ramayana is no myth and is embodied in historical evidences by withdrawing findings not only from archeological but also geographical, social, and archival research approaches. Regarding Valmiki Ramayana, he says (**1972**), 'What Valmiki created was a heroic poem went on being inflated from time to time, incorporating at least some features of that time. When this poem was created, mythical things – characters and events – were introduced into the story' (**Ibid: 15**). He indeed does not deny the authenticity of the story and probability of the characters present in that time but he does accept play of imagination that functions in poet's mind to create and therefore mythologize incidents that serve as poetic license for aesthetics. To prove *Ramayana* as documentation of the real incidents and people, researchers and scholars are to justify the existence of those people in that historical period. This controversial debate – myth or reality – is still continued; the focus of discussion here will be *bhasha Ramayanas* and their role in social, cultural, and at certain point, religious construction of a multilingual society and how they break center-periphery dichotomy and call attention to its multi-nationality.

Ramayana has been playing the role of historical and cultural contact between Hindu India and Asia. The Ramakatha as narrated in the *Ramayana* is an omnipresent text rendered in different discourses around the world literature. Each retelling has a different narrative to present before the audiences and with different intentions. Referring to ubiquitous phenomena of the *Ramakatha*, the Tamilian author, R. K. Narayan (**1972**) opines, '... I am prepared to state that almost every individual among the five hundred millions living in India is aware of the story of the Ramayana in some measure or other' (**1993: xi**). Indian social and cultural life is greatly influenced by *Ramakatha* '…in one form or another at all times, it may be as a scholarly discourse at a public hall, a traditional story-teller's narrative in an open space, or a play or dance-drama on stage' (**Ibid**). The existence of Rama narrative in different forms–Indian *bhasha*, oral traditions, and Southeast Asian discourses–confirms the existence of subverted stories that revolve around the way of telling its different episodes. Various renderings have inflected the known Sanskrit text by substituting it with local culture of the language and linguistic system. Availability of Ramayana in modern Indian *bhasha* languages, oral and textual forms, promotes their *bhasha* literary discourses, their cultural expansion, and most importantly their determination for creating a literary, social, cultural, even a political place in multilingual India which emphasizes pluricultural aspects of Indian society. *Bhasha* renderings do not function to contribute to creating national literature but to help in expansion of different linguistic and cultural identities without uniting them in a unified whole; 'a 'national' literature, in other words, has to be more than the sum of its regional constituent parts' (**Ahmad, 2000: 244**). Instead of establishing a national literary canon in one language, for instance Sanskrit, the *Ramayana* retellings present pluricultural world in plurilingual world – 'sita' in Kannada means 'sneeze' while the same word 'sita' in Sanskrit implies 'furrow'. The presence of one same linguistic sign in another linguistic system underscores the pluricultural nature of a single linguistic sign and pluricultural characteristic of plurilinguality. The comparison of three retellings in *bhasha* intends to present its contribution in creation of pluricultural heterogeneity with respect to plurilingual systems without uniting them into the category of Indian literature.

Comparative Valences of Ramayana

Kampar's *Iramavataram*, written around 12th century in Tamil under the influence of Tamil *bhakti* cult, has imbued religious, divine, and theological implications for Ramakatha; however, in previous retellings and pre-Sangam literature Rama is addressed as God, Vishnu. Rama from the very beginning of the Kampar-text is presented as the incarnation of Vishnu who has come on earth to end the destruction created by the Rakshasas

having Ravana as an emblem of evil. The author's *bhakti*, drawn from his guru ninth-century Nammalvar (**Ramanujan, 1999**), established Rama as God. Such religious implications are not missing in Goswami Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas*, written in 16ᵗʰ century in *bhasha* Awadi (a Hindi dialect) under the medieval bhakti movement in north India. He is said to draw the story from his guru Narharidasa and named it *Sri Ramcharitamanas* as Siva called the story while telling it to his wife Parvati. Retelling the Rama-katha under Sagun tradition of *bhakti* (God with form), opposite to Nirgun *bhakti* (formless God), he presented himself as incarnation of Valmiki and Rama as the incarnation of Vishnu upholding *dharma* and going beyond the existing Hindi culture with its influence on other cultures. The medieval *bhakti* movement from the Tamil Nyanmar and Alvar, from sixth to twelfth century, spread in other parts of India. Celebrating revival of Indian scriptures, the bhakti tradition challenged the Brahmanic authority and dependence on Kashatriya royalty, gaining mass support; their social protest attempted to 'purge Hinduism of its accumulated ills' (**Majumdar 1992: 102**). These two retellings present Rama as incarnation of Vishnu differ largely from the Valmiki *Ramayana* which presents Rama as a human endowed with good attributes standing against the evil like Ravana; only the first and last book addresses Rama as Vishnu-incarnation. *Kirttivasi Ramayana* or *Sriram Pacali* by Krittibas Ojha, written in fifteenth century in Bengali, reemphasizes personality of Rama as incarnation of Vishnu by establishing him in devotional and religious discourses. The Bengali retelling is deeply imbued with social and cultural ethos of Bengali tradition; in spite of presenting Ravana as a demonized character, his redemption is able to arouse sympathy and admiration for him. And the birth of Bhagirath is one of the major digressions of the story-line. Sequential analogies, patterns of difference, and narrative valences among these retellings make for the incommensurability of the comparison.

Structural Analogies in Bhasha Retellings

The foremost analogy in these retelling is found in the treatment of personality of Rama as an incarnation of God, Vishnu. The initial descriptions of the retellings of Tulsi and Krittibas show the analogies in referring to religious stories. Tulsi begins the first book, Balya Kand, with Mangalacharan and Vandana before describing Manas and Bhardwaj-Yagyavalk dialogue while Krittibas presents Sanskrit Rama divinity *sloka* before illustrating the Brahma-Narad and Ratnakar meeting followed by Valmiki-dialogue and which describes how the Rama-personality came to Valmiki's mind. Kampar-retelling presents a Tamilian stereotypical description of land and the city before describing the Rama-narrative. The third section of *Tolkappiyam* (5ᵗʰ century), Tamil poetics, categorizes Tamil discourses into two parts – *akam* (*aham*) (inner) and *puram* (outside)

(**Ramani, 1992**). *Akam* explores inner world such as love, devotion, etc. and *puram* war, administration, prosperity, preaching etc. (**Ramani, 1992; Parthasarthy, 2003**). Kampar begins with description of the river *sarayu*, the land, the city *Ayodhya*, the King Dasharath, and then the divine descent or ancestors; however, before these descriptions, he also refers to Rama glory in his prologue.

Rama-glory in Iramavataram
He alone is our head,
Our sole refuge, who, by himself,
Creates, preserves and puts an end
To all the world in ceaseless support.
A milky ocean is Rama's lay
Which I, a lowly cat, would fain lap up—
Its huge waves, refulgent, roaring,
I, a feeble wit, try to take on, led by a fond hope of success. (**Prologue in *Bala Kandam*, 1 in Sundaram translation**)

Rama-glory in Sri Ramcharitmanas
Varnanamarthasanghanam rasanam chandsamapi,
Mangalanam ca karttarau vande vanivinayakau.1.
               *   *   **
Sitaramgunagramapunyaviharinau.
Vande vishuddhavijnanau kavishvarakapisvarau.4.

I reverence Vani (the Goddess of speech) and Vinayaka (God Ganesha) the originators of sounds represented by the alphabet, of multitudes of objects denoted by those sounds, of poetic sentiments as well as of metres, and the begetters of all blessings.

I pay homage to the king of bards (Valmiki) and the chief of monkeys (Hanuman), of pure intelligence, both of whom sport in the holy woods in the shape of glories of Sita and Rama. (**Sloka, *Bala-Kanda*, *Sri Ramcharitmanas*: 1-2**)

The Tulsidas retelling begins with the invocation to Gods and Goddesses and at first he invokes the Goddess of speech Vani and Vinayaka, Lord Ganesha. Invocation of Ganesha, the foremost God to worship for initiating any religious ritual, is typical of Hindu tradition; after invoking Him, he invokes Parvati as Goddess and Sankara as his consort, i.e. Siva-Parvati. Then he pays his tribute to Valmiki to help him in forming the glories of Rama and Sita. Kampar renders a *bhasha* attitude to his retelling. After the appraisal of Rama as a 'spotless' and last of his descent, he expresses his intention to retell the glory in his language – 'I shall take the earliest master for my source/ To render into Tamil song' (Prologue 1). He explicitly informs the readers that he is going to induce his Tamil retelling

with two Tamilian idiosyncrasies – (i) Tamilian cultural ethos coming with the language; and (ii) writing a Tamil poem within the conventions of Tamil poetics. The Bengali retelling emphasizes the worship of Narayan who consequently takes birth as Rama. At first, the sage Krittibas glorifies Rama in a Sanskrit *sloka* – 'Rama Lakshmanpurvaj raghuvar sitapatim sundaram;/ kakutstham karunamayam gunanidhi viprapriya dharmikam// Ramaya ramchandray rambhadraya vedhse;/ raghunathaya nathaya sitayah patayeh namah' (**Adi Kanda,** *Krittibasi Ramayana* **27**).[vi] Afterwards he ascribes to Narayan of Baikunthpuri, in the section 'Narayan char ansh janm-praksh', and his intention of taking birth to put an end to destruction done by Rakshasas – '*Ye roop achen hari golok bhitar, janm tite achhe shati sahastra vatsar./ Ravan rakshas habe prithvimandale,/ tahake vadhite janm leben bhutale'* (***Adi Kanda,*** **28**).

The Ahilya-salvation episode in these three retelling show close analogies among themselves but they differ from the Valmiki. In Kampar, Ahilya gives in to Indra, despite knowing his disguised form as her husband Gautam, and Guatam curses Indra to be covered with thousands vaginas and Ahilya's transformation into a stone.

> She knew who he was, but inebriate with unfamiliar feelings induced by his ingress, she didn't desist – so low she'd sunk. When her lofty husband hurried home and saw what he saw, he became a second Siva.
>
> *   *   *
>
> Fire darting from his eyes at what had passed in his absence, his words blazed forth, like one of your own shafts: "A thousand *pundenda* svall cover you," he said, and Indra was so covered that very instant! (***Bala-Kanda, Ahalya* 12 in Sundaram, 2002**)

In Tulsidas, she is relieved from her curse with the touch of Rama's 'lotus-feet' and after that she sings a song of appraisal of Rama. The story of curse and incident is not described because Tulsi believes his readers to be aware of the incident. In Krittibas, she is presented as under the control of compulsive desires or some forbidden feelings (as in Kampar) that she is unable to restrain and gives in to the disguised Indra as Kampar presents her. Krittibas also presents the cursing of Indra as one where he is covered with vaginas – '*jati nasht kaili tui ore purandar, yonimay hok tor sarvv kalevar./ Ahilya ke shapilen krodhe munivar, kananet tor tanu hauk prastar'* (**Adi-Kanda, 178**). Tulsi only refers to how she is liberated from her curse and sings a song of glory of Rama – "*parasata pada pavana soka nasavana pragata bhai tapapumja sahi, dekhata raghukanya jana sukhadayak sanamukha hoi kara jori rahi*" (**Bala-Kanda, 208**). 'At the very touch of His holy feet, which drive away sorrow, emerges Ahilya, a true

embodiment of austerity. Beholding the Lord of Raghus, the delight of His servants, she stood before Him with her joined palms' (**Ibid: 209**).

Patterns of Difference

Valmiki Ramayana is divided into seven *kandas* or cantos and his seventh book is said to be a later addition. Following Valmiki, Kampar, Tulsi, and Krittibas have also divided their retellings into different *Kandas*. Kampar divides it into six *kandas – Bala Kandam, Ayodhya Kandam, Aranya Kandam, Kishkindha Kandam, Sundar Kandam,* and *Yuddha Kandam*. Tulsi Ramayana is divided into seven kandas – *Adi Kanda, Ayodhya Kanda, Aranya Kanda, Kishkindha Kanda, Sundar Kanda, Lanka Kanda,* and *Uttar Kanda*. The only difference in Valmiki and Tulsi is that Tulsi replaces the *Yuddha Kanda* of Vamiki and Kampar with Lanka Kanda. Krittibas divides his retelling into five chapters– *Bala Kanda, Ayodhya Kanda, Aranya Kanda, Kishkindha Kanda,* and *Sundar Kanda.*

The metrical variations with respect to their indigenous aesthetic framework are unique to each of the retelling in its tone, texture, and characterization. Tamil literary influences particularly *Cilapattikaram, Tolkappiyam, Tamil Azhlavars, Jivika Chintamani* are eminent in Kampar. He is said to follow the metrical form of *Jivika Chintamani*. His *Iramavataram* is composed of *viruttam* metre. He has employed approximate ninety variations of Tamil poetic metres *viz. kali, viruttam,* and *turai* (**Sundaram, 2002**). Out of four *viruttam* forms–*veli, achiriya, kali*, and *vanji– achiriya* is predominant and he is said to employ ninety six metrical variations (**Naidu, 1971**). Tulsi *Ramcharitmanas* is composed in *doha-chaupayi* metre in Avadhi, based on Jayasi's *Padmavat*. Tulsi also uses other metrical variations – *matric* forms like *soratha, tomar, harigeetika, chappaya, tribhangi*, and *varnic* forms like *anushtup, rathodata, sangdhara, malini, totak vanshastha, bhujangaprayat, nagaswaroopini, basant-tilika, indravraja, shardoolvikreedit* (**Naidu 1971, 526**). These forms are chief characteristics of Hindi poetry. Krittibas follows medieval Bengali *Sriram panchali* form 'Bengali form celebrating the glory of a deity, generally composed in simple *patyar* metre something like sing-song doggerel, narrated by *kathakas'* (**Bandyopadhyay 1997, 34**). The Bengali metre, *payar,* enhances the linguistic beauty of the retelling. His choice of medieval Bengali metre intends to address not only the learned audience but also the 'simple village folk who understood neither Sanskrit, nor chaste Bengali, which is based on Sanskrit vocabulary' (**Ibid: 35**).

> *sriguru charan saroj raja nija manu mukuru sudhari,*
> *baranau raghubara bimala jasu jo dayaku phala cari*.
> **(*doha – Bala-Kanda Ramacharitmanas*, 121)**

bara bara kaha rau sumukhi sulocini pikabacani,
karana mohi sunau gajagamini nija kopa kara.25
   (*soratha – Ayodhya-Kanda Ramacharitmanas*, 374)

rajadwar nikate chalen rama dhire, vriksha arhe lukaiya thaki dui veere,
bali dware sugreev chhadibe simhnaad, tahate avashya bali shunibe samvaad,
karibe tomar sange samar aradhha, ek baande bali ke karib ami stabdh,
bali dware sugreev chhadibe simhnaad, bahir hayil bani dekhite pramad.
   (**Bengali** *payar* **– Bali-Sugreev battle,** *Ayodhya Kanda*, *Krittibas-Ramayana,* **380**)

In love he's like the Mother;
In doing good he is like Thavam,
The good fortune of a previous birth);
In guiding people steer
The right course (of deliverance),
He's like a dutiful Son!
He's like Disease
(In punishing the wicked);
He's like Medicine
(In relieving their pain and misery);
And he's like Intelligence and Reason
To those in research engaged
In the subtle subjects of enquiry!
   (**Dashrath,** *Bala-Kanda*, **6 in Mudaliyar, 1970 translation**)

Bhasha influences in their renderings are eminent. *Bhasha* linguistic style and aesthetic devices color their structural construction; they also help in localizing the story with its different cultural features. Kampar has followed the poetic style of Tamil poetry as described in *Tolkappiyam*. The blend between *aham* (inner experience) and *puram* (external) makes his poem fall within Tamil poetics. The Bengali *payar* style avails the story even to the folk people, likewise Avadhi becomes accessible to common Hindi speaking people. One of the most significant differences in description of the glory of Rama as an incarnation in these retellings is in their treatment of Rama's own awareness towards his incarnate character. In Kampar, Rama makes no reference to and is himself unaware of the fact that he is an incarnation (**Parthsarthy, 2002**).

Narrative Valences

The narration of different episodes differ in these retellings but they unit themselves through intention of various episodes. The Rama-Sita meeting is described differently by these sages. Tulsi presents how Sita is overwhelmed by the beauty and appreciation that her female companions and after performing *Girija puja* in her garden her eyes meet with Rama's; both behold each other. Kampar makes the couple fall in love at first sight and presents how Rama suffers the pangs of love. Krittibas tells how Vishwamitra while travelling invites Rama to visit Mithila for Sita-*swaymvar*.

> *Kamb-Ramayanam*
> Sita of beauty unimaginable,
> Standing on the terrace
> Of her royal mansion,
> And Rama walking
> On the road below –
> They saw each other!
> And such was the love
> And passion in their eyes
> They seemed o pounce upon
> And devour each other!
> And that meeting of the eyes,
> Like a magic chain,
> Pulled their hearts, one toward the other,
> And lo! Rama entered
> Sita's heart
> And Sita Rama's!
> **(The birth of love, *Bala-Kanda*, 23-4, Mudaliyar, 1970 translation)**

> Oh! My eyes two and mind –
> All see her everywhere!
> Can it be that lightning,
> From heavens descending,
> Hath the shape of a maid taken?
> It can't be so! (**Ibid: 26**)

> *Tulsi-Ramacharitmanas*
> *Tata janakatanaya yaha soi, dhanushajagya jehi karana hoi,*
> *Pujan gauri sakhi lai ai, karat prakashu phiraiphulavai.1.*
> *Jasu bilokik alaukik sobha, sahaja punitamora manu chobha.*
> *So sabu karana jana bidhata, pharakahi subhada amga sunu bhrata.2.*

Brother, she is no other than the daughter of King Janaka, for whom the bow-sacrifice is arranged. She has been escorted by her girl-

Vishwakarma. Exchanges 2024 11(2), pp. 133-160

147

companion to worship Goddess Gauri and is moving about in the garden diffusing light all about her. My heart which is naturally pure, is agitated by the sight of Her transcendent beauty. The reason of all this is known to god alone; but I tell you, brother, my right limbs are throbbing, which is an index of bringing good fortune. (**Bala-Kanda, 226**)

Krittibas-Ramayana
Ye jana shiver dhanu achhe yei khane, sabha saha gel seyi swayamvar sthane
Henkale Janaka balen kutuhale, sabhaya basiya katha shunen sakale,
Ye jana Shiver dhanu bhangivre pare, Sita name kanya ami samarpit tari.
Ye katha shuniya Rama kamal-lochan, dhanukar nikatate karen gaman
Henkale Sita devi saha sakhigada, attalika pare uthi kare nirikshan.
Janaki balen sakhi kari nivedan, konjana Rama va konjana Lakshman.
Sitar dekhay sakhigada tuli hat, durvvaval shyam oi Rama Raghunath.
(**Mithilagaman**, *Adi-Kanda*, **185**)

The three retellings present common wedding of Rama-Sita through swayamvar; however, each of them differ in narrating the incident. The most significant digression is presented by Kampar, who makes the couple fall in love and let the lover suffer the pangs of love. Tulsi also shows how Rama expresses to Lakshaman the ecstasy of emotion that he goes through; but he also mentions how the God knows well the reason behind the sudden overflow of emotion in his heart. Krittibas deviates from the inclusion of the episode of their earlier meeting before swayamvar. Sita gets to behold Rama only in her *swayamvar* and Rama's chief motive is to break the celestial Siva-bow.

It is no doubt that Kampar through Rama-Sita meeting introduces digression from original Valmiki to interweave his poem with Tamil literary style. Krittibas, however, presents a major and subverted digression through the narrative of the Bhagirath-birth. Introducing same-sex love in Indian literary discourses, he makes two women give birth to a child. When Raja Dilip dies living his wife and co-wife childless, Siva, worried for Rama's birth in Dilip's lineage, gives his wives the boon to procreate. The Lord suggests them to make love to each other which eventually results in the birth of a child.

Vishwakarma. Exchanges 2024 11(2), pp. 133-160

148

> *Diliper dui jaya achhilen baase, vrish arovande Siva gelen sakashe.*
> *Kahilen donhakar prati Tripuraari, mam vare putravati habe ek nari.*
> *Dui naari kahe shuni Shiver vachan, amra vidhwaa kise haibe nandan.*
> *Shankar balen duijane kar rati, mam vare eker haibe santati.*
> *Ei var diya gel Dev Tripurari, snaan kari gel dui Diliper naari.*
> **(Bhagirath-birth,** *Adi-Kanda,* *Krittibas-Ramayana* **62)**

A formless body is born to one of the co-wives and the child remains a boneless lump of flesh until the sage Ashtavakra transforms him into a beautiful and strong child. Tired sage looks at the body and says, 'If you are mimicking me to make fun of me, may your body be destroyed by my curse. If, however, your body is naturally as it appears, may you, by my blessing, become like Madanmohan, the God of erotic love' (**Roy, 2000: 101**). This episode is the author's invention to introduce same-sex love in Indian text and particularly in Bengali discourses.

Bhasha Ramayana – Relevant Translation or Tetellings or 'Trans-Text'?

> What remains is that––trust me––I don't transgress a code of decency or modesty through a provocative challenge, but through a trial, by submitting to the experience of translation to the trial of untranslatable. (**Derrida 2001: 178**)

Addressing plural receptions of one single sign in different linguistic system, the linguists and translators question relevant translation in theoretical and practical frame. Questioning the genuine translation, even before Derrida, Friedrich Scleiermacher (1813) targeted its assimilation or domestication, that is 'an erasure of the foreignness of the foreign text by rewriting it in the terms of the receiving language and culture' (**Venuti, 2001: 171**). The select three *bhasha* renderings of the *Ramayana* represent either shallow adherence to Valmiki or an abrupt break-up with the Sanskrit. None of them intend to assimilate the *ur*-text Valmiki in their renderings which provides them ample space to locate their retellings in *bhasha* linguistic culture. The resistance to assimilation creates *bhasha* literary discourses with an encouragement to amplify their position in Indian literature. *Bhasha* renderings resist homogenization of Indian culture and prefer heterogeneity in Indian literary and cultural discourses. The cross-cultural and literary exchange and the influence through translation enables them to comprehend and spread respective culture in different societies. *Kambaramayanam* exposes little influence of Sanskrit *Ramayana* and tries to embrace Tamil literary style while Tulsi-*Ramcharitmanas* engrosses the Kampar religious essence which questions the very impression of relevant renderings in translation. Addressing the question of polylingualism, Derrida's reflections (**2001**), critiquing the sign

[Vishwakarma. Exchanges 2024 11(2), pp. 133-160](#)

149

with an attempt to free domesticating strategies, present the engagement of translation with an 'economy of in-betweenness' standing between 'absolute relevance, the most appropriate, adequate, univocal transparency and the most aberrant and opaque irrelevance' (**Ibid: 179**); this address to polylingualism calls attention to polycultural valences[vii] found in the linguistic patternical behavior of a language and its respective socio-cultural ethos which is liable to leave its traces in the renderings or retellings of the former text. *Krittibasa Ramayana* refers to the incident where Rama is asked to perform *Shakti puja* before going to battlefield. This incident emphasizes the prominence of worship of Goddess Kali in Bengali culture. *Bhasha* often engages into a constant struggle to create their literary discourse on one hand and to position them within Indian literary discourses on the other with the emphasis on heterogeneity. Therefore, their challenge to assimilation into the original reflects foremost their interest to create a *bhasha* audience and to introduce existing text steeped in their own cultural ethos. Moreover, assimilation is of no use to them when the struggle is to create a unique historical background:

> The concept of the 'original' may not only be essentialist, as Jacques Derrida and other deconstructionists have argued it to be but, whether essentialist or not, it may simply not be a concept of any significance in other cultures which have, among other factors, a shorter history of both anti-communitarian romantic individualism and crass print capitalism. (**Trivedi, 2014: 107**)

Ramayanas in folklore or in unwritten forms are replete with illuminating telling by tribal people, dalits, Adivasis, and village women of different regions of Indian states. Folklore grounded on myths and legends reconstructs history on the basis of their lived experiences and worldview of the current times. Recent scholarships on the study of *Ramayana* present how epic like Ramayana has been recreated by local communities of tribal and dalit people; Azeez Tharuvana (**2021**) has brought this rigorous research by interacting tribal-dalit-religious communities of his village Wayanad in Kerala and other villages. Written forms (*varamozhi*) and oral narratives (*vamozhi*) present origins of *Ramayana* in different ways as the former is considered standard and documented while the latter undocumented and nonstandard. *Adiya Ramayana*, *Chetti Ramayana*, and *Sitayanam* are two prominent tribal local retellings of Valmiki-*Ramayanas* and Ezhuthachan *Ramayana* each of the three representing diverse socio-cultural milieus of communities living in Wayanad. K. N. Panikkar considers *Ramayana* a social text and opines,

Vishwakarma. Exchanges 2024 11(2), pp. 133-160

150

> They [Wayanad Ramayana] are an indication of the cultural plurality of India. In this sense, Ramayana is not a religious text. It is a social text, a text that reflects the life of the communities in which these tellings are born. (**Panikkar, 2021: xi**)

Wayanad Ramayanas show more subverting and unacknowledged telling of Valmiki narrative by presenting Sita as having fallen in love with Ravana. However, it is significant to know that in Wayanad, Ravana is still presented as a demonized character who deploys maneuver and ruses to win Sita's heart. Sita lives in Pulpally where the local population urges her to leave, as it is the sacred site of their lord Pakkatheyyam (Pakkam); but as she agrees to leave, Ravana comes, woos her, and takes her to his palace in Sri Lanka. Ram also bewitched by her beauty falls in love with her and decides to win her by any ways. Localized with their social and cultural milieus, Adivasi deities like Valliyoorkavu Bhagavathy, Pulpally Bhagvathy, Thirunelly Perumal, and Siddhappa appear in *Adiya Ramayana* while forest fairies like Athirukalan, Arupuli, Kaikolan, and Tampiratti in *Chetti Ramayana* (**Nujum, 2021**).

Kampar Ramayana encourages growth of Tamil literature and calls attention to contribution of Sangam literature to Indian literary discourses. Therefore, political implication of the renderings is not to be denied because they not only address the rapid growth of modern *bhasha* languages to erase the homogeneity of Indian culture and language but also the increment in their audience. The differences found in their renderings highlight the need to have the same acceptability and respectability as held by the dominant Indo-Aryan languages like Hindi. Lefevere, addressing the need to emphasize differences and thereby plurilingual phenomena of a society, alerts the translators not to remove the difference but to re-emphasize the role of plurilinguality to create a pluricutural world with due respect to heterogeneity.

> Languages are different, and no amount of translator training is ever likely to reduce that difference. Translator training can, however, alert translators both to the relativity of translation poetics and to strategies that may be used not to "overcome" the differences between languages, which are undeniable given, but to project "their" image of the original, which may be influenced by various considerations, not just of ideology and/or poetics, but also of the intended audience of the translation. (**Lefevere, 1992: 100**)

These *bhasha Ramayanas* have immensely influenced social and cultural life of the respective audiences. The episode of Sita *agni-pariksha* or ordeal of fire situates the question of women's chastity as central to familial life. Kampar has presented a literary work by writing a Tamil poem following Tamil poetics. Tulsi, however, intends to introduce a religious

Vishwakarma. Exchanges 2024 11(2), pp. 133-160

151

text for his audience by expressing his devotion to Lord Rama. Kampar is said to suggest secular society for his audience but Tulsi following traditional religious scriptures promotes cast-system in Indian social order. In Kampar men-folk and women-folk are not discriminated for following brotherhood. Guha introduces Sita as his sister-in-law and Kaushalya calls him as his son; the author even makes Kumbhakaran tell Rama about his brother Vibhishan, 'My brother does not heed to the petty concepts of caste-system on birth and recognizes only the eternal laws of righteousness' **(qtd. in Naidu 1970: 528)**. Tulsi tries to establish traditional social order based on varna-system for the ideal Rama-Rajya, 'Everyone devoted himself to his duty in accordance with his caste and stage of life, and ever found happiness in treading the Vedic path' (**Ibid: 529**). The woman question is one of the burgeoning issues in these retellings. Sita is an embodiment of ideal woman. The submissive and obedient women like Sita are adored while passionate, bold, and strong women like Surpanakha are to be questioned for their womanhood and liable to be punished. Tulsi explicitly ascribes to such attitude and his text undoubtedly injects the audience with this thought. Television becomes an eminent platform to spread the idea throughout the world. The *Ramayana* series by Ramananda Sagar telecasted on Doordarshan (**1987**) was arguably influenced by Tulsi *Ramacharitmanas*.

Krittibas has induced only women-centered episodes in Bengali *Ramayana*; however, there are women poets who have composed completely women-centered *Ramayana*. The local retellings of Kerala like the Wayanad Ramayanas have confirmed women-centered local narratives among tribal and Adivasi people. In medieval 16th century, there have women poets Chandraboti, an impoverished Brahmin woman from a small village of east of Bengal and Molla, potter's daughter from a small Indian town of Andhra Pradesh; they remained unmarried and earned by writing poetry in Bengali and Telugu respectively. Molla's Ramayana is considered one of the classical Ramyanas in Telugu and ranked after two medieval Ramayans in Telugu by Ranganatha and Bhaskara while Chandrabati's Ramyana is considered weak in style and structure and only two of her ballads – *Sundari Molua* and *Dasyu Kenaram* – are regarded as gems of her Ramayana (**Dev Sen, 1997**). Chandrabati presents Sita as daughter of Mandodari who delivers an egg by mistakenly drinking sages' blood kept in a box by her husband, Ravana. The soothsayers predicted that egg contained destruction of rakshasas race; as Ravana wished to destroy it Mandodari keeps it in a box and throws it into the sea. The fisherman, Mahabijaya's wife Sata finds it gives it to king Janak and aks them to name the girl Sita after her name (**Nujum, 2021**). Chandrabati Ramayan is prescribed in literature curricula in Bangladesh and India's West Bengal (**Dev Sen, 1997**). Local deities of Bengal like Manasa,

Mangalpandi, Banadurga, Sulapani, Shithla, and Shashthi in *Chandrabati Ramayana* (**Nujum, 2021**).

Women in Krittibasa are presented with an independent and strong attitude. Wife and co-wives of Raja Dilip symbolizes how women can be independent. The same-sex parenting adds on to a new paradigm that the author seeks to introduce. There are two versions of *Krittivasa Ramayana*. The first version refers to how two women are asked by Siva to make love to reproduce while in another the two women, Chandra and Mala, willingly makes love to each other passionately under the strong influence of erotic love (**Vanita 2005: 147**). When Dilip dies under a curse, Lord Brahma asks Vasishtha to impregnate his wives but he refuses.

> He requested Vasishtha to help Chandra and Mala get a son.
> "Vishnu Vishnu," said the sage, covering his ears,
> and refused to comply with their wishes.
> After Vasishtva's refusal
> they called upon Madan [God of love],
> as Madan reached the king's palace,
> the two queens began menstruating.
> Three days later they took the purifying bath,
> entered their husband's palace and lay down there.
>   *   *   *
>
> Burninj with desire induced by Madan, Chandra and Mala
> took each other in embrace,
> and each kissed the other.
>   *   *   *
>
> This is how Malavati became pregnant. (**Bhattasali trans. qtd. in Vanita 2005: 147-8**)

This incident is a bold subversion of the tale of Bhagirath's birth not found in the Vamiki text and neither of the *bhasha* renderings. The incident suggests the inference to same-sex love and parenting in Indian medieval lifestyle. Medieval *bhakti* cult which influenced Tulsi and Kampar also influenced Krittibasa however his attempts to deviate from the existing trend indicate the author's freedom in experimenting with the existing literary trend. And the episode indeed makes people either question the author or appreciate him for introducing a different narrative before her audience. The incident can be looked from the perspective of independence and agency accorded to women characters.

Bhasha Ramayanas remain an area of contention and negotiation for promoting and establishing nuances of plurality in multilingual India as well as across South Asia. They do not reconstruct history or manipulate it for creating their autonomous identity rather they help social groups to

Vishwakarma. Exchanges 2024 11(2), pp. 133-160

153

shape their culture and language in literary discourses in written or unwritten forms. These texts are no more religious texts but social text, cultural text, and more recent days literary texts or what Paranjape says 'trans-text'. They do not museum-ise their social and cultural plurality but bring them recognition. Ramyanas in Indian *bhashas* in themselves constitute literary traditions and therefore they can never be called a mere translation or version of the acknowledged Valmiki-*Ramayana*; they represent multi-national sensibilities of different nuances of plurality of Indian culture. Commenting on the need of cultural plurality of India, GJV Prasad remarks:

> This seems to be the time to use famed multilingualism and multi-culturalism to further the cause of egalitarianism, to work towards social inequality and provide greater opportunities to the oppressed peoples of the world. The truth perhaps is in the contestation, in the negotiation. (**Prasad, 2009: 164**)

The recent Ramayana studies in Wayanad by Tharuvana (**2021**) distinctly call attention to the Ramayanas of the social groups like tribes and Adivasis or even women that remain on the margins of the social hierarchy. He even goes to bring a balanced and harmonious interaction between Hindu and Muslim religion. He refers to Persian translation of Ramayana by Badayuni and Giridhar Das and cites sources[viii] (Sri Sri Ravishankar and Balram Paniccar) to build a bridge by drawing parallelism between Rahman and Ram, Brahma and Ibrahim (Abraham), Saraswati and Sara, and Rabbi and Ravi (**Ibid: 151-5**). Thus, *bhasha Ramayanas* in a harmonious ways move to construct Indian consciousness among different social and cultural groups to recognize multi-nationality co-existing in Indian society.

Conclusion

Bhasha Ramayanas are at the core of the construction of literary discourses and of regional literatures of India, while also impacting local culture of distinct communities of different social groups. The chief focus of *bhasha* retellings is questioning and subverting the idea of translation by making it a 'trans-text' and therefore calling *bhasha Ramayanas* translation is devaluing its autonomous authenticity in a multilingual. Challenging the *ur*-text of Valmiki, they make improvisations with Rama-story to strengthen their *bhasha* audience, to educate village folk or social groups, and most importantly to assert their autonomous identity co-existing in a multilingual country. These retellings illuminate subverted narratives of Rama-story along with Sita, Lakshman, Hanuman, and Ravana. Some South Asian and South Indian retellings present demonized character like Ravan as humanized. Their different perspectives and focuses call attention to various social issues – marginalization of one caste by the other, women's question, female subordination and their

resistance to subjugation, conflict between fate and free-will. The discussion of three retellings represents differences as a result of their linguistic and cultural valences. Multifaceted representations of *bhasha Ramayanas* in Indian multilingual world allow the unacknowledged groups and communities to come on the surface by drawing attention to multi-nationalist ethos. However, it cannot be denied that while the nuances of cultural pluralism often give rise to conflict they compensate this with the probability of asserting individual recognition of the groups, texts, languages involved, as is the case of *Ramayanas*.

Acknowledgements

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155

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158

Endnotes

i Author's general notes:

(1) Two prominent turns, 'linguistic turn' and 'cultural turn', call attention to the intersectional relations to language and socio-cultural condition of the community speaking that language; their influence on translation is indispensable.

(2) *Shruti* and *smriti* are two Sanskrit forms of texts; the former refers to 'that is heard' and the latter 'that is remembered'.

(3) Frederic Jameson's distinction between parody and pastiche has revealed parody as having some 'sympathy' with the 'original' which it copies while pastiche contests the 'possibility of an "original"' presenting the 'original' as a failed effort to 'copy' an ideal (Butler 1990). This very concept has problematized the possibility of the 'original'; therefore, it is difficult to find whether Valmiki's *Ramayana* (based on *smriti*) is the 'original' directly coming from a Brahmin's mouth or as copy of some other copy.

(4) Scleiermacher (1813), Derrida (2001), Philip Lewis (2004) along with other critics have interrogated the possibility of relevant translation in terms of different renderings of a foreign or the original text.

(5) *Renderings* and *retelling* are typically italicized to emphasize the employment of Derrida's *rendering* and Ramanujan's use of *retellings* (avoiding the words like version or variant), in the essay, interchangeably for showing the semantic-cum-symbolic and syntactic valences.

(6) *Thamizah*: South Indian or Dravidian language, often spelled as Tamil.

ii UR Ananthmurthy (2009) in 'Literature in the Indian *bhashas*: Front Yrads and Backyards' disfavours use of 'vernacular,' 'regional,' or 'ethnic'; he finds them insulting and prefers *bhasha* over other terms.

iii Since Valmiki is supposed to be first to document the Ramakatha; his *Ramayana* can be considered the *ur*-text.

iv It is also referred to as latter Sanskrit *Ramayana* (Richman, 2008).

v It is written in a Dravidian linguistic peculiar style *pattu*, using non-Sanskrit meter and Tamil alphabet and it is written in a strange language neither complete Tamil nor Malayalam, both are dispensable (Menon, 1991).

vi The epic, *Ramayana* has been translated in various vernacular languages. The original Valmiki *Ramayana* is structured into seven books viz. *Bala-Kanda* (*Adi-Kanda*), *Ayodhya-Kanda*, *Aranya-Kanda*, *Kishkindha-Kanda*, *Yuddha-Kanda*, and *Uttara-Kanda*. These Kandas are translated as Books which are further subdivided into various Sargas (translated as Chapters or Cantos). Valmiki's *Ramayana* is written in *shloka* (a verse-form), often in *anushtup chhanda* (four-feet of eight syllables each, i.e. 32 syllables). Tulsidas's *Ramacharitmanas* has been written in various Chhanda (meters), *chaupai* (four-line quatrains), *doha* (couplets), and *soratha* (eleven and thirteen metrical feet in odd and even stanzas respectively. Despite being influenced by their respective linguistic and cultural backgrounds, these vernacular renderings have retained the structure of the epic as divided into various Kandas or books. However, they have employed different meters of their respective linguistic structures. For instance, *Krittivasa Ramayana* is written in Bengali *payar chhand* (meter) consisting of fourteen syllables. *KambaRamayana* is written in *viruttam* (a devotional song improvised in one or more *ragas*, i.e. melodic framework) and it consists of only six books skipping the seventh found in Tulsidas and Krittivasa.

vii Philip Lewis has also questioned the relevant translation by calling it 'abusive fidelity'; 'polyvalencies and plurivocities' reveal the problematization of adherence to relevance while rewriting it. See – *The Measure of Translation Effects* in *The Translation Studies Reader* ed. Venuti, 2000.

viii Please see chapter *Muslims and the Ramayana* in Azeez Tharuvana's *Living Ramayana* (2021).