Taking advantage of the recent importance accorded to narratives, I shall begin this paper with an anecdote. I sometimes write Oriya short stories for local journals. My regular audience, a close circle of friends, do not think that these stories are anything special. However, it so happened that one of them was translated into English and published in *Kahâ Prize Stories*. Friends who read the English version were genuinely impressed by the novelty of the theme, its dramatic presentation and its message. When I pointed out that this was the same story they had earlier dismissed as trite in both subject and treatment, they were surprised; they suggested that the translator had modified, upgraded, the text. Theoretically, this is within the realm of possibility. Alexander Tytler proposes that translation is a contest between the geniuses of the author and the translator, in which the translator "strives to exalt a worthy original by expunging or altering low images, puerile allusions and obvious defects which detract from the overall effect" (1978, 54). But in the case of my story, though the name of a venerable Oriya literary personage appeared as the translator, as far as I was concerned, the real work—the telling of the story—was done by me. And I had this perverse Nabokovian insistence on literal renderings to such an extent that sophisticated renderings in the target language were excluded. How then did an Oriya short story, initially dismissed by a well-read and knowledgeable audience, not only retain, but surpass what Walter Benjamin has called its "aura" in translation?
Eugene Chen Eoyang has an interesting insight to offer about such a phenomenon:

It may be that translation is the ultimate form of literary evaluation—for only seeing it from the outside can one see a work for what it is. Knowing can be differentiated into native command and abstract understanding: the first embodies what is known, and knowledge becomes familiarity (like knowing something like “the back of one’s own hand”); the second defamiliarizes what is known, and knowledge becomes analytical insight (like knowing how to operate on someone else’s hand). Translation involves the second kind of knowing: the native, even if he understands and appreciates the translation in the target language, will encounter it as something strange, often to be deplored, occasionally to be relished (like contemporary Japanese preferring *The Tale of Genji* in English translation, even to the many modern Japanese versions). (1993, 278)

It is apparent that both Tytler and Eoyang, while theorizing on translation, refer to exalted texts which have been canonized in the original version prior to being translated. In contrast, the case of my story involves a work which becomes canonized only after, and seemingly because of the fact that, it has been translated into another language, and especially into English. The very fact that a text is considered worthy of translation somehow elevates its canonical worth. There is an assumption that the text has the capacity to speak beyond the boundaries of the specific cultural-linguistic context of its origin. This phenomenon is specially true of the contemporary literary situation in Orissa. For the purposes of this paper, I will offer two possible explanations for this state of affairs: the first refers to the traditionally high esteem in which the act of translation is held in the Oriya canon; and the second refers to the unprecedented significance accorded to English, a language under postcolonial dispensation. This shift in linguistic authority is accompanied by a decay of the Oriya literature readership.

The act of translation is central to the formation of an Oriya literary canon. With the exception of valiant attempts by saint-poets such as Luippa and Kanhippa to record their spiritual realizations in the symbolist minimalism poetry of *Charyā Gitika*, which were written in the people’s language, the earliest Oriya texts were translations from Sanskrit. This translation phenomenon is not limited to either the Oriya or Indian context, in fact it is true of most of the literatures of the world. According to Alastaire Fowler, “Many of the most original works are based on the creative reinterpretation of predecessors in a genre” (1982, 31-32). What is so significant about endotropic translation into Oriya is that it has always aligned itself with the attempt to formulate a distinct cultural identity of the Oriya-speaking people. Endotropic
Long after the emergence of several spoken languages from Sanskrit (around the tenth century AD), the mother language continued to be the language of the scriptures, art and knowledge. Since it was in the hands of the elite priestly class, they were able to control the spiritual as well as secular domains of the people’s lives. The lower castes were forbidden to learn Sanskrit or to read the scriptures. Thus, the hegemonic designs of the elite were perpetuated. In the fifteenth century, the foundations of what we know today as written literature in Orissa were laid by Sarala Das, who translated into the popular language Oriya the *Mahābhārata*, the great Sanskrit epic by Vyasa concerning the war between Bharata’s descendants; the *Vilankā Rāmāyana*, a Sanskrit epic, ascribed to Valmiki, recounting the exploits of Rama; and *Chandi Purāṇa*, an epic poem based on the Sanskrit *Durgasaptasati*, containing 5,500 verses. By so doing, he not only violated the norms laid down by the elite class—for he belonged to a lower caste—but dared to show easy acquaintance with the texts he translated, and also other important Sanskrit manuscripts. He was translating holy texts from *deba bhasa*—the language of the Gods—into Oriya, the language of humans. Moreover, his translations were subversive in numerous ways: the text of the *Mahābhārata* was re-articulated to better suit the nature of the Oriya people; the *Vilankā Rāmāyana* subverted the patriarchal male order by attributing Rama’s victory over the thousand-headed Ravana of Vilanka, not to the help of an entire army, but to the aid of his wife Sita, the incarnation of Shakti, the eternal feminine principle. Sarala Das himself was a worshipper of Shakti.

The revolutionary zeal of a translator can usually be gauged from the depth of his or her social commitment and eagerness to share a truth articulated in another language with his or her own people through translation. Sarala’s translations, or rather his transcreations, are ample proof of the culturally revolutionizing nature of his inspiration. His literary efforts coincided with the rise in the Oriya people’s military and political fortunes under Kapilendra Dev, who, like Sarala Das, was of very humble origins. Kapilendra Dev unseated his predecessor, a king of the Ganga dynasty (498 to 1435), during whose rule decadence had set in in all walks of Oriya life, and ascended the throne of Orissa. He extended the political territory of Orissa from the Ganges in the north to the Godavari in the south; and he made a significant contribution to stabilizing the internal administration of his kingdom. As a major sponsor of art and architecture, Kapilendra Dev enriched the cultural life of the Oriya people. At the same time, Sarala assumed the cultural leadership of Orissa, and sought to forge a distinct lin-
Sanskrit still found favour among the elites: kings and noblemen continued to sponsor Sanskrit poets and scholars; and Brahmins were still very influential in matters of administration. For these reasons, though the importance of Sanskrit was waning throughout northern India, it still commanded enormous respect in Orissa. In the twelfth century, Sanskrit was the chosen language for Jayadev’s *Geeta Govinda*, as it was in the fifteenth century for, among others, Biswanath Kaviraj’s *Sāhitya Darpana*, a famous treatise on literary aesthetics; Murari Mishra’s *Anargha Rāghaba Nātakam*; Bhattanarayana’s *Benisankharam Nātakam*; Krushna Mishra’s *Prabodha Chandrodaya Nātakam*; and Srihasa’s *Naisadhiya Caritam*. Despite the prestige that Sanskrit enjoyed among scholars and in the courts, Oriya, which was derived from Purva Magadhi around the ninth and tenth centuries, became established among the common people, around Sarala Das’s time. The elites, however, looked down on the language, branding it *prakrit* language, or *bibhasa*. Indeed, references of such hostility toward the language of the common people can be found in the famous prose-poem by Avadhuta Narayana Swami (thirteenth century), *Rudra Sudhānīdhī*, the earliest complete prose work in Oriya. Despite opposition from the establishment, Sarala’s translation of the *Mahābhārata* into the people’s language employed the Dandi rhyme—a popular composition technique in which each line of each couplet contains eighteen letters. Sarala must be considered a true revolutionary who was able to bring Indian philosophy and literature to the common people, freeing them from the monopoly of Sanskrit scholars and Brahmins, and to establish the Oriya language and literature.

The Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* largely conveys the worldview of the Vedic Brahminical culture, and dramatizes the conflict between good and evil as it is perceived therein. According to the Vedic Brahminical worldview, the true purpose of human life is to acquire the four *bargas*, or goals—*dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksa*, that is, duty, material goods, love and the final liberation of the soul—through the discipline of the four *ashramas*, or stages of life—*brahmacharya*, *gārhadṛṣṭya*, *banaprastha* and *sanyasa*, that is, celibacy, the married state of the householder, the state of retirement to life in the forest and the final renunciation of all worldly interests. In the course of delineating this worldview the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* postulates the ultimate triumph of good over evil. The good characters in the Sanskrit epic exemplify the dharmic life. Sri Krishna, the hero of the epic, and the five Pandava brothers, who are representatives of the dharmic ideal, appear to be very divine in their conception (Biardean 1982, 75-97).

Indeed, the *Mahābhārata* was written against the background of Aryan culture in contemporary northern and central India of the time. However, since Sarala Das wanted to use contemporary Orissa of his time as the backdrop for his transcreation, he had to initiate several changes in the original
plot, characterization and episodes. Unlike the Sanskrit characters therefore, Sarala’s Oriya characters are not overtly divine; in fact, they resemble the average Oriya: Sri Krishna is a village tout trying to accomplish his ulterior motives through good means and bad, as it suits him: several of his actions—such as placating an ass when it threatens to sabotage his mission; killing Belala Sena through deception; seducing Radha’s maid, Sahaja Sundari—serve to indicate his Machiavellian shrewdness. Similarly, Bhima is a simpleton with the very human weakness for food and wrestling, yet, despite his foolhardiness, his unwavering devotion to his elder brother makes him an adorable character. Draupadi, though she has given birth miraculously in the pit of a sacrificial pyre, is unable to refrain from a verbal duel with her co-wife, Hidimbika, like any other ordinary Oriya countrywoman. Despite having five husbands, she openly confesses her lust for Karna, and expresses her reluctance to spend the first night of marriage on the ashes of a smithy. In order to produce a truly Oriya national epic, Sarala Das took several liberties with the original Sanskrit epic, sometimes omitting episodes and occasionally expanding others or adding new ones to his Oriya narrative. Thus, he was not only able to humanize its appeal, but also to locate it in the very soil of Odissa. A good illustration of this point is the episode of Kokua with which Sarala replaces the Sanskrit Mahabharata’s narration of how Kala, the force of destruction, appeared in every house of Dwarka around the time of the annihilation of the Yadus race. Despite all their might, the marauding Yadus warriors could do nothing to prevent Kala. The Oriya episode of Kokua enabled the common people to grasp the complexity of the cosmic force of destruction. Other episodes that were invented to suit Oriya culture include Gandhari’s marriage with a Sahada tree, Bhima’s stealing of rice (indicative of the abject poverty of an Oriya peasant family) and Duryodhana’s swim across the river of blood.

In the sixteenth century Jagannath Dash translated the Bhagabata, Hindu sacred literature known as the Puranas—another important text of the Oriya literary canon. Though a Brahmin himself, Jagannath Dash faced similar opposition from the Puri Mukti Mandap, the Brahmin orthodoxy which controlled the Hindu faith. It is believed that Jagannath Dash’s main purpose in translating this sacred text was to enable his mother—women not being allowed to read Sanskrit—to read it for herself. During this period, Bhakti movements, movements based on devotional poetry, which sought to undermine the priestly mediation between man and God, were spreading all over the country, and many more translations of Sanskrit texts into popular languages were produced. In sixteenth-century Odissa, in addition to Jagannath Dash’s work, many other works were translated, including Balarama Das’s translation of Valmiki’s Ramayana—another milestone in Oriya canonical literature—and various translations by Brindavan Das.
Translation activity also flourished in seventeenth-century Orissa: Mukul Das translated *Betāla Panchavīnsai*, and a portion of Rupa Goswami's *Bidagdha Mādhava* was translated by the poet Gopalakrishna Patnaik. Other notable translations of that period include Krishna Singh's *Mahābhārata*, Haladhara Das's *Ādhyatma Bhāgabata*, Balabhadrā Mangaraj's *Kṣetra Mahatmya* and Balaram Das's *Gīta*. In addition, many Vaishnavite Oriya poets drew inspiration from earlier Vaishnavite Sanskrit poets, in their writings. The translations of the time all aimed at demystifying the sacred texts by rendering them in the language of the ordinary people, in the same way as the various religious movements were seeking to free religion from the stranglehold of Brahminical orthodoxy. Translations into Oriya maintained their ideological imperative of subversion of the dominant discourse by democratizing knowledge, by making it available to all sections of society, including women, and challenging the hegemony of the power elite.

It is not purely coincidental that most of the endotropic translation activity was undertaken at a time when the Ganga and Gajapati kings of Orissa had built a powerful empire that stretched from the Ganges in the north to the Kaveri in the south, and the Jagannath Temple at Puri had become a very important seat of the Hindu faith. Endotropic translations became associated with the consolidation of Oriya nationhood. The same flurry of endotropic translation was witnessed again in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, when a movement to form a separate province of Oriya-speaking people in colonial India was underway. Threatened by the attempts of the neighbouring Bengali-speaking people to undermine the status of Oriya as a language, litterateurs used translation as a tool for consolidating and strengthening Oriya language and literature. This was also the time when Oriya literature adopted a strategy to wean itself from its Sanskrit base, toward a more colloquial mode. This is seen especially in the writings of Fakirmohan Senapati.

The sphere of translation increased in the nineteenth century with the widespread use of the printing press. Fakirmohan, who was at the forefront of the movement to protect the identity of Oriya as a separate Indian language, was also involved in establishing the first printing press in Orissa. In addition to his original writings, he devoted a great deal of energy to the activity of translation: he not only translated Sanskrit texts such as the *Rāmāyana*, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Chhāndogya Upanisad*, but also Bengali texts such as Iswarchandra Vidyasagar's *Jīvan Carita*. *Sitā Banabhāsa*, another text by Vidyasagar, was translated by Bichhanda Charan Patnaik, and Jaganmohan Lala translated the parts of Toynbee's history that were especially relevant to Orissa. Contemporaries of Fakirmohan who took an active part in the movement to maintain the separate identity of the Oriya
language and literature were also aware of the importance of translation in such an enterprise. Poets Radhanath Ray and Madhusudan Rao translated Meghadutam, Tulasi Stabaka and Bhababhuji’s Uttara Rama Carita respectively, and Madhusudan Rao also transcreated William Cowper’s famous poem “The Solitude of Alexander Selkirk.” Other notable translations around that period were Meghaduta by Kalidasa; Chaura Panchāsika by Gopinath NANDASHARMA; Naishadha by Biramitra Singhdeo; Bhagadb Guī by Acharya Harihar; Rāmāyan by Lingaraj Mishra; and Bikromorbashi. Mudrārākšaṇa, Benisamhāra, Kumār Sambhava and Mālati Mādhava by Mrityunjaya Rath.

It is evident that the litterateurs of the Satyabadi group, the cultural centre of Orissa in the early twentieth century, maintained the revolutionary zeal which was associated with Fakirmohan’s and Radhanath’s efforts to assert the importance of Oriya language and literature. It is significant that they were also aware of the role of endotropic translation in enriching the Oriya literature: Nilakanth modelled his Pranayini and Dāsa Nāyaka on Tennyson’s The Princess and Enoch Arden respectively. Godavarisha’s Abhagini is modelled on Hugo’s Les Misérables. Contemporaries of the Satyabadi group also excelled in endotropic translation: Ajaya Chandra Das translated Scott’s The Lady of the Last Minstrel, Chandramani Das translated Goldsmith’s The Deserted Village and Govinda Tripathy translated Cervantes’s Don Quixote.

Under colonial administration, an important change took place: Western texts gradually became more esteemed than Sanskrit texts as originals for endotropic translation. The tone was already set by Christian missionaries who had translated into Oriya the major Christian religious texts, including the New Testament, as well as Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress. While there were rare instances of texts such as Kautilya’s Arthasastra and Bhratihari’s Niti Satak and Sringara Satak being translated into Oriya, after India’s independence from colonial rule toward the mid-twentieth century, more and more texts of the Western canon were rendered into Oriya. Akshaya Kumar Chakravarti and Mayadhar Mansingh introduced the works of Shakespeare to Oriya audiences; indeed, Chakravarti’s Hamlet and Mansingh’s Othello stand out as brilliant pieces of translation. During this period, Basant Kumar Satpathy translated Charles and Mary Lamb’s Tales from Shakespeare and Amar Ballav Dey rendered Carlyle’s The Hero and Hero Worship into Oriya. Also worth noting are Lala Nagendra Ray’s translation of Melville’s Moby Dick, Krishna Mohan Mohanty’s translation of The Prisoner of Zenda and Subodh Chatterjee’s translation of Richardson’s Pamela. Popular literary texts and children’s books were also translated into Oriya during this period, including Conan Doyle’s Valley of Fear by Udayanath Sarangi, Bram Stoker’s Dracula by Panchanan Pati, Rider
Haggard's works by Ghanashyam Samal, Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and some of Jules Verne's works by Bansidhar Das. During the same time, Udayanath Sarangi's translation of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—the American classic set during the time of slavery—was a roaring success among Oriya audiences, especially children, but also adults, probably because it dramatized the tension between master and slave, between colonizer and colonized, and brought out the latent divinity in the downtrodden—a sentiment so dear to the Oriya heart, which has been conditioned by endemic adversity to glorify a fatalistic spiritualism. Gopinath Mohanty, a prominent Oriya creative writer of the post-independence era, whose work valorized the underprivileged and marginal groups in Orissa, undertook to translate Tolstoy's magnum opus *War and Peace*, while Gyanindra Verma presented Eliot's *The Waste Land* in Oriya and Pravash Satpathy translated Russian classics, including Dostoevsky's masterpiece *Crime and Punishment*. In the same vein, Ananta Patnaik, one of Orissa's pioneering leftist poets, translated Gorky's *The Mother*. This translation was significant in the sense that it sought to articulate the theme of the original novel against the background of an entirely Oriya ambience.

However, it is the translation efforts of Chittaranjan Das and Prafulla Das that stand out, not only by the sheer volume of their work, but by the ideological nature of their enterprise. Jorge Klor de Alva, in his essay "Language, Politics and Translation," argues that "the politics of a translation (or interpretation) are more likely to be configured by the unspoken and usually unperceived assumptions making up the reigning ideas and exegetical rules that guide the translator" (1989, 143). But these two translators almost consciously sought to open up windows through which Oriya literature could benefit from and Oriya people could experience the broader world outside. Chittaranjan's Oriya translation of *The Pilgrim Kamanita* from the Danish original, Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*, Gibran's *The Prophet*, Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, as well as the works of Sri Aurobindo, Ashapurna Devi, Albert Schweitzer, François Mauriac, Verrier Alwyn, Mahatma Gandhi, Radhakrishnan and Martin Luther, were all exercises in expanding the capacity of colloquial Oriya to convey the insights of great literatures from all over the world.

Prafulla Das spent his time and fortune trying to make the major classics of world literature available to Oriya audiences through his own abridged Oriya versions. His efforts were pioneering in the spheres of both publishing and translation. His father, Mohan Charan Das, rose from the position of compositor in a printing press in Calcutta to become a small-time publisher of limericks and religious books, which he sold, along with country-made paste, in a shop in Calcutta to a clientele made up of a sizable number of Oriya migrant labourers. During World War II, he returned to
Cuttack to start the Manmohan Press, which eventually became Orissa’s leading publishing house. Prafulla Das, who had an early exposure to translation into Bengali during his childhood in Calcutta, inaugurated a new phase of publishing in Orissa. Breaking away from his father’s publishing venture, which specialized in the publication of Oriya religious texts, he set about bringing world classics to Oriya audiences through his translations, and often at great financial loss.

While many international publishers imposed a condition whereby a minimum of 2,000 copies had to be printed before the copyright could be extended, in Orissa during that time, the average first print run was 1,100 copies; the remaining books would be trashed, causing a great deal of financial loss to the company. But Prafulla Das’s early idealism—inspired by his tutor, Panchanan Chakravarti, and stoked by his reading of Romain Rolland’s Jean Christophe, which inspired him to share his joys with Oriya readers—remained intact, even after he had been reduced to a state of penury. The credit of introducing the Nobel laureates of literature to Oriya goes primarily to him: not only did he translate the works of Pearl S. Buck, Romain Rolland, André Gide, Knut Hamsun, Herman Hesse, Ernest Hemingway and others, sometimes under the pen name Subhadra Nandan, he also published more than seventy world classics in translation. He was ably assisted in his venture by Chittaranjan Das, whose commitment to Oriya language and literature not only made him a renowned translator, but also a versatile prose writer of more than a hundred original works, which introduced a new critical idiom into the Oriya language.

Both as a translator and an essayist, Chittaranjan Das has proven possible what saint-poets such as Achyutananda and Jagannath Dash, from the Middle Ages, and Fakirmohan Senapati and Gopinath Mohanty, in more recent times, had already attempted to prove before him: that the most esoteric and complex philosophical, literary and critical theories can be articulated in colloquial Oriya. The contributions of Prafulla Das and Chittaranjan Das are all the more remarkable because not only was their enterprise not viable financially, but it was carried out at a time when even the regional literary establishment sneered at their efforts. Prafulla Das was accused of being the enemy of original Oriya creative writing: writers and publishers were apprehensive that if the reading public got a taste of the depth and complexity of great world classics, they would stop patronizing original Oriya literature, considering it not of the same calibre as the foreign literature. Subsequently, however, the major publishing houses joined the translation bandwagon as soon as the market became more favourable.

I earlier noted that major endotropic translation coincided with moments in Oriya history when Oriyas either commanded an extensive
political, economic and cultural power base or were busy fending off the hegemonic aspirations of other languages seeking to undermine their literature or were motivated by the patriotic desire to strengthen the cultural base of the Oriya-speaking people. Eoyang offers another insight on this phenomenon:

Might there be a relationship between the rise and fall of a culture and its exotropic and endotropic phases. Exotropic civilizations may be short-lived at the height of their cultural imperialism but incipiently in decline; endotropic civilizations may be still in their gestation phase and may enjoy an extended life. (1993, 59)

If his diagnosis holds for endotropic translation into Oriya, it certainly sounds ominous when one considers the state of exotropic translation of contemporary Oriya literature.

The Odiya language policy in postcolonial India has always been rife with contradictions. While governmental rhetoric on the adoption of Oriya as an official language has been shrill right from the days of Nabakrishna Choudhury's government in the late 1950s, for all practical purposes the social reward system continues to favour the learning and mastery of English and, in some rare cases, Hindi. Speaking about the case of classic Nahuatl in New Spain, Klor de Alva comments that dominant language groups, and those in political control, perpetuate their hegemonic assumptions through language policy (1989, 143). Indeed, the ruling class in Orissa—as well as that of India—which was co-opted into the colonial administration, continues to hold the political reins, and the position of English, like the erstwhile position of Sanskrit, is one of political and economic power. Moreover, instead of remaining a language of higher learning, it has gradually infiltrated secondary and primary levels of schooling. Since social advancement is usually dependent on one's mastery of English, there is hardly any motivation to consolidate literature in the regional language. The almost total decline of endotropic translation into Oriya is proof of this state of affairs.

In the rare instances that endotropic translation into Oriya is undertaken, publishers and their commissioned translators are often not motivated by the kind of idealism and commitment to the Oriya language as were witnessed in a Prafulla Das or a Chittaranjan Das. Often the works to be translated are chosen not for their literary merit, but purely for their saleability: for example, several publishers and translators jumped on the Tasleema Nasreen bandwagon when the Bangladeshi author became an international celebrity for her political stance. But, there are worse instances of publishers and translators catering to the prurient interests of the reading
public by producing translated versions—often grossly distorted ones—of works like the *Kama Sutra*, Pramilla Kapur's survey of the life of Indian prostitutes and books that were objects of legal battles in the courts of law for reason of obscenity, such as Budhadev Basu's *Rain Through the Night* and the works of Samaresh Basu.

Such translations often do not serve the cause of Oriya literature; rather, they present a very distorted picture of literature to the Oriya reading public. Similarly, contemporary exotropic translations from Oriya also present a very distorted view of Oriya literature. For obvious reasons (usually marketing), instead of works that are truly representative of the Oriya literary canon being translated into English, it is usually works by more contemporary creative writers that are translated. This may be due to the fact that most contemporary Oriya writers are exposed to Western education, and the cultural ambience of their work tends to be less ethnocentric, therefore more translation-friendly and posing fewer problems to the prospective exotropic translator, whereas the ethnicity of older texts of the Oriya literary canon is very pronounced. In an essay entitled “Translating from the Oriya: An Approach,” Jayanta Mahapatra, a translator whose commitment to exotropic translation from Oriya can be compared to Chittaranjan Das’s commitment to endotropic translations, opines:

> How can one portray to a western reader the vertebrae of a culture he probably has learnt to shun through the decades? For instance, the interior of a village house, like the inside of a shell with its cramped space; the physical belongings of a rural family such as a sackful of paddy, dried-up cowdung for fuel, some dry gourd seeds—all this adds up to a picture of acceptance and contentment which is difficult to convey to a Western reader. (1981, 28)

Apart from the cultural aspects that are so intrinsic to a particular language, Mahapatra also cites the difficulties that particular Oriya authors present:

> Neither Upendra Bhanja nor Gangadhar Meher used free verse and their poems literally sag with the weight of ornamentation and alliterative sounds... Even the later poets of the Oriya language, poets like Radhanath Ray resorted to strict, musical verse forms, something that fed the poetry with a feeling of mysteriousness. Oriya diction is slow and formal, the sounds of words seem to dig into the mind and meander in the deeper layers of the imagination. Let us consider the first four lines of the poem “Chilika” by Radhanath Ray:

\[
\text{Utkala-Kamala bilasa-dirghika} \\
\text{marala malini nilambu chilika} \\
\text{Utkalara tuhi charu alankara} \\
\text{Utkala bhubane sobhara bhandara}
\]
How very clever, how concise is the construction of this verse form! With what perfection has the poet woven the sounds of each line: How very much does each line convey, with its sensual, archaic flavour! Into the four words of each line is compressed the deep passion of the poet; and how does one translate a compact verse form of this type into a foreign medium such as English? (27-28)

Despite such difficulties, Jayant Mahapatra, through his translations of ancient medieval texts such as *Rudra Sudhanidhi*, the love lyrics of Banamali, Gopal Krishna, Padana, Gangadhar Meher's *Tapaswini* (unpublished), the poetry of Sachi Routray and Fakirmohan Senapati's stories, has made a genuine effort to represent true Oriya literature to an outside audience. But, in the same essay, he alludes to extraliterary reasons behind some of his translations: "If I have, for example, chosen to translate the poetry of Sitakanta Mahapatra, Soubhagya Kumar Mishra and Devdas Chhotray, doesn't it smack of a selective behaviour? Why not other, equally significant poets of the Oriya language?" (29) In a recent conversation with me, he was more forthright and explained that as a teacher with the Orissa Government, he had occasionally succumbed to pressure from ministers and bureaucrats wishing to have their poems translated from Oriya, thereby contributing to a distorted representation of the Oriya literary canon.

Jatindra Nayak, a professor and translator engaged actively in exotropic translation activity, commenting upon the eagerness of contemporary Oriya writers, especially writers with the power and position to get their work translated into English, proposed in a recent interview with me:

The need to get one's work translated into English was not felt until recently by Odissa writers. Most of our creative writers occasionally took to translating/adapting classics of European literatures in their search for models, new techniques and sometimes with a subversive intent. But translation into English was not a priority with them. What they primarily sought was an enthusiastic response from their readership and a warm and intimate relationship with their audience. The growing alienation of modern Odissa writers from their reading public may have contributed to the tendency to look for a readership in other language communities. The role [that the] translation of *Gitanjali* into English played in establishing Rabindranath Tagore in the West was another important incentive for vernacular authors to get their works translated into English. There seems to be a feeling in the air that a work has not fulfilled its destiny, has not completed its journey, unless it is available in English translation... The eagerness of the author to see his works in English translation is a recent phenomenon.
And this is occurring at a time when more and more Oriyas are renouncing loyalty to their language and harbouring a sense of hatred toward their own mother tongue, due, most likely, to their early education in English, which has become a status symbol in India.

Simultaneously, there has been a substantial decline in the number of readers of canonical Oriya literature in Oriya. Along with a faulty education policy, the failure of modern Oriya literature, especially Oriya poetry, to address the concerns of the larger body of Oriya-speaking people gradually served to wean readers from canonical literature. Canonical literature became the domain of a very closed, elite circle of readers and writers, making the Oriya publishing business a very risky affair. Publishers were only willing to publish the works of writers who could influence the Raja Rammohan Library Trust Fund and the bulk purchase of their books for various government libraries. This perpetuated the nexus between publishers, bureaucrats and academicians who were not at all interested in creating a regional readership, but rather in gaining a wider public through exotropic translations. This may be a natural progression if, as Eoyang argues, “certain cultures that have become preoccupied with their own importance will either sanction or promote exotropic translation, that is disseminating their own native reaches to the rest of the world” (1993, 54). In a postcolonial society such as Orissa, exotropic translation into English may also be interpreted as a sign of profound insecurity; for translation into English not only ensures the work a place in the canon of its original language—as in the case of my story—but it also ensures a fairly wide audience. In fact, to twist Benjaminian logic a little, translation into English gives Oriya works “life” as opposed to “afterlife.” The authors most translated into English are usually those who have translated their work themselves or who have gotten them translated through friends, on their own personal initiative: witness Manoj Das and Kishori Charan Das, two contemporary Oriya writers whose works have often been available in English, and who are their own translators. When I asked about his motives for translating his work into English, Kishori Charan Das, in a recent letter, admitted that “self-interest” was his main motivation in undertaking these translation projects. And in a personal letter to me, K.K. Mohapatra, a noted contemporary translator in Orissa, whose motivation for such an exercise is the patriotic desire to assert the importance of Oriya literature among a larger audience, said that most of his early translations into English were not done because of any commitment to the works’ literary worthiness, but because of his “enthusiasm for the writers and their personal relationship.” A lack of concern for literary worth is also borne out by the fact that today there are many more instances of living writers being translated than earlier writers who contributed to forming the Oriya literary canon.
Clearly then, exotropic translation from Oriya has no other guiding principle but the writers’ desire—which K.K. Mohapatra calls “everyone fending for oneself”—to reach the elite Western educated audience at home and abroad, rather than cultivate a readership among the masses. As I have mentioned earlier, sometimes this attitude ends up projecting a distorted image of the Oriya literary canon to the outsider who has no knowledge or understanding of the Oriya literary scene. Indeed, in the recent _Oxford Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry_, Paresh Chandra Raut, who is hardly known as a poet in Orissa, is presented in English translation as a representative of modern Oriya poetry. Contemporary exotropic translations lack the progressive character of early endotropic translations, which challenged the dominant discourse by identifying with disempowered and marginal sections of the society. Today’s exotropic translations are co-opted into the realm of highly educated Indians and Westerners—a tendency that has been criticized by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o of Kenya in _Homecoming_ and _Decolonising the Mind_. Ngũgĩ himself no longer writes in English. In Orissa, the situation has turned full circle: Oriya literature, which started out as an effort to free sacred texts from the hands of the elites, and the elite language of Sanskrit, is gradually, almost gleefully, becoming museumized in another elite language, this time, English. To illustrate my point, I will use as an example the translation of one of Gopinath Mohanty’s novels, _Parajā_, which relates the lives of villagers living in underdeveloped parts of Orissa. Now, due to the lack of an imaginative literacy program in Orissa, the very people whose lives the novel relates have no access to the text, which portrays—often quite effectively—their colloquial speech rhythms, idioms and worldview. But thanks to the English translation—which, as Paul St. Pierre puts it, “has somewhat sanitized the ethnic dimension of the text”8—an elite international readership has easy access to the texts. This sanitization or “homogenization,” as Tejaswini Niranjana describes, “to simplify a text in a predictable direction, towards English and the Judeo-Christian tradition and away from the multiplicity of indigenous languages and religions, which have to be homogenized before they can be translated” (1992, 180), misrepresents the traditional culture and constitutes a new type of colonialism, one now practised by dominant groups in Orissa, in the same way that the British misrepresented Hindu India through translation.

Unless tribal groups, who are often the subject of these literary works, have access to both the original and the translated texts, such misrepresentation through translation cannot be challenged. This raises the issue of literacy at the local level, for without the diffusion of mass literacy, such a state of affairs is not nearly in sight. Nonetheless, despite the misrepresentation of a culture, exotropic translation, ironically, heightens the value of a literature by putting it on the world scene. As Eoyang rightly points out, in our world of transparent barriers,
Moderns bent on everlasting fame may have to consider not only how well they write, but also how well their works translate. Contemporary writers, from Gombrowicz to Lem to Milan Kundera to Nabokov to García Márquez to Simone de Beauvoir to Yukio Mishima and Yasunari Kawabata, have depended crucially on their translators for international recognition. (1993, 52)

International recognition will definitely enhance the status of Oriya literature, not only in India, but worldwide. But there must first be something to translate. Without a strong, ongoing literary culture, the Oriya language will soon wither away from disuse, and there will not be much—nor quality—Oriya literature to translate. What is urgently needed is a widespread literacy program, accompanied by endotropic translation into Oriya and popularization of literature, as well as some guiding principle regarding the choice of texts to be translated. Such a policy, in the name of literacy in Oriya, will also act as the rudder for accurate representations of Oriya literature through exotropic translation.

Notes

1. I am grateful to Mr. Ernest Bond, GTA (Department of Children’s Literature, School of Education, Ohio State University, Columbus), and Mr. Braja Kishore Maharana, Lecturer in Oriya (Anlabereni College, Dhenkanal, Orissa), for their valuable comments and suggestions.

2. A native Oriya, he captured the throne in 1435 and founded the Gajapati dynasty, which lasted until about the mid-sixteenth century.

3. A general term for vernaculars that existed alongside, or evolved from, Sanskrit.

4. A worshipper of Vishnu in one or other of his incarnations.

5. Fakirmohan Senapati (1843/7-1918) is the leading Oriya literary figure of his age; he began producing serious literature only after fifty-five years of age.

6. For more details, see the bibliography by Gyanindra Kumar Pradhan in Istahara 14 (Apr.-June 1981): 96-106.

7. For a detailed analysis of India’s language politics, specifically with regard to Orissa, see Golok Behari Dhal’s Odiya Kebe (1963).

8. In a conversation.

Works Cited


