The difficulties which immediately arise when terms such as colonialism or postcolonialism are used are by now well-known, and so too are the critical discourses that they nevertheless make possible and which account, at least in part, for their continued use. My aim here will not be to justify or to criticize the use of such terms; rather, I wish to examine the way in which certain themes they point to are played out in Chha Mana Atha Guntha (literally Six Acres and Thirty-Two Decimals)—an Indian novel published at the turn of the century, at a time when the British Raj was actively consolidating its power and position in India—as well as the transformation these themes undergo in the three English translations of the novel which have appeared since Indian Independence. It will become clear that although all three translations are postcolonial, in more than a merely chronological sense, they differ greatly in the choices made by the translators and in the way they situate themselves in relation to colonial rule. The tension between the generalization necessarily involved when terms such as colonialism and postcolonialism are used, on the one hand, and the specification of particular texts and contexts, on the other, informs my approach here.

More specifically, this paper will look at the way in which two important and related instruments of British colonial rule—law and language—figure in the novel, and how they are dealt with in the translations. Bernard S. Cohn has demonstrated that law and language within India under colonial rule were part of a larger series of “orderings” imposed on Indian
society by the colonizers. Often through the use of translation and the equivalences it provided, British categories of thought were substituted for native Indian ones. Of the educated Englishmen who arrived in India in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Cohn writes:

In coming to India, they unknowingly and unwittingly conquered not only a territory but an epistemological space as well. The “facts” of this space did not exactly correspond to those of the invaders. Nevertheless, the British believed they could explore and conquer this space through translation: establishing correspondence could make the unknown and the strange knowable. (1996, 4)

Conquest of India was to take place through the translation of one space into the other, both literally and figuratively, a translation which involved a hierarchical ordering, with one space—the native or Indian space—marked as inferior and in need of translation. This conquest took various forms, and Cohn has defined different modalities of appropriation whose purpose was to give the colonizers control by transforming the Indian space in terms of their own familiar categories and prior expectations (5-11). Among these were observation and travel, mapping and surveys, census-taking, the collection of artifacts and the production of historiography. As Cohn remarks, the “conquest of India was a conquest of knowledge” (16).

Many of these modalities arose out of very pragmatic concerns. One of the principal aims of the production of historiography, for example, was to determine “how revenue was assessed and collected” (5). As Sunil Khilnani has pointed out, the notion of the state the British brought to India was fundamentally different from that existing there: they defined “power in political terms and located it in a sovereign, central state,” one of whose principal duties was “to siphon off commercial and economic benefits more efficiently” (1997, 21-22). The same economic concern was at the heart of the codification and “clarification” of the Indian legal system, its ultimate transformation in terms of British modes of thought and functioning based on the interpretation of precedent, which were alien to the modes of legal functioning native to India. The main purpose of such clarification was to ensure regular revenues to the state through the assessment of taxes on property. For such revenue to be collected, the ownership of property needed to be clearly established. Thus Sir William Jones (1746-1794), one of the major figures of British colonial rule in India, set out with the purpose of codifying the aspects of civil law which would determine “those rights, public and private, that affected the ownership and transmission of property” (Cohn 1996, 71). As will be seen in the discussion of Chha Mana Atha Guntha, the effects of such reform on Indian society were profound and often disastrous.
Yet another purpose of codification was the desire to avoid reliance on native interpreters of the law, as their honesty, competence and disinterest were deemed suspect. Jones distrusted “Indian scholars’ interpretations of their own legal traditions” and “wanted to provide the British courts in India, the Crown, and the East India Company with a sure basis on which to render decisions consonant with a true or pure version of Hindu law” (69). As such, the codification of law was intimately tied to translation into the English language, as the law was to be administered by British judges and courts, with the result that during the first part of the nineteenth century it was “the chain of interpretations of precedents by English judges that became enshrined as Hindu law” (emphasis added) (75). Significantly, what had begun as an attempt to provide India with “a true or pure version of Hindu law” ended with its replacement by law made in India by British judges.

The learning and codification of Indian languages through the production of grammars and dictionaries, as well as the production of translations into English, was also one of the modalities of colonial control (see, in particular, “The Command of Language, and the Language of Command” in Cohn 1996, 16-56). English was introduced as the language of administration, law and higher education, which had the effect of limiting access to positions of power and influence to Indians who developed a vested interest in ensuring the continuation of colonial rule. Proximity to the colonizers, whether geographical or linguistic, or both, as in the case of the Bengali “babus” (see note 10 infra) in the nineteenth century, created new elites, which became increasingly distanced from their own society and culture. Identification with the colonizers seemed to provide an opportunity to escape the inferior position in which these very colonizers had placed them, and one form this identification took was the adoption of English at the expense of their native Indian language.

The use of English in India, which has continued and even increased since Independence, is certainly one of the more enduring legacies of British rule, although the importance English retains should now be seen more in a global perspective than as a purely colonial heritage. In a country where only a tiny educated minority have access to English, it remains the language of the courts and of higher education, and retains its function as a source of position and privilege. *Chha Mana Atha Guntha* draws attention to the ambiguity surrounding the use of English, to the creation within India of a heterogeneous English space in contradiction with local and regional traditions and history. The novel represents, but also problematizes, the hierarchy of languages and cultures established during the colonial period, resisting the dominance of foreign linguistic spaces, whether English or, as in the case of Bengali, the language of the intermediary spaces between the colonized and the colonizer. Examples of the latter are the language of
middle-level administrators (the babus) acting as go-betweens in the two spaces and whose interest lies in maintaining the separation, and the language of lawyers, also positioned between the two spaces and able to manipulate the legal system to their own advantage.

It is largely because the novel is written in an Indian vernacular that this dual space, with its hierarchies, impositions and renunciations, can be so effectively evoked. What happens then when the novel is translated into English, the language of the colonizers? As Vicente Rafael has rightly argued, all translation activity necessarily involves the creation of hierarchies; it is the particular nature of the shift from one set of hierarchies to another, through the process of translation, that this paper will attempt to describe.

Chha Mana Atha Guntha

Chha Mana Atha Guntha, by Fakir Mohan Senapati, was serialized in the monthly publication *Utkal Sahitya* between 1897 and 1899, and published in novel form in 1902. It is considered a founding text of modern Oriya literature, and the first Indian social-realist novel. Despite being held in high esteem, it nevertheless remains at a temporal, cultural and linguistic remove from its readers. This distance is both one of tone and of language, the duality inherent in the narrative voice serving to create an ironic distance between text and reader, while yet another form of distance is created through the use of non-Sanskritized, colloquial Oriya rather than the more "elevated" forms usual in literature. Somewhat paradoxically, the decision to use language closer to that of everyday use has resulted in the novel containing words and expressions which have disappeared from modern Oriya and which require explanation and footnotes for today’s Oriya reader. Indeed, the difficulty which the original poses for such readers will very likely lead many to have access to the text solely through its English translation.

Chha Mana Atha Guntha recounts the rapacious greed of the main character, Ramachandra Mangaraj, and his mistress, Champa, their lust for a small plot of land—the six acres and thirty-two decimals referred to in the title—and their ultimate downfall: she is murdered by a fellow thief and Mangaraj is dispossessed at the hands of an unscrupulous lawyer. The manipulation of the legal system is a major theme of the novel and a moving force behind the unfolding of events. Of as much interest as the bare storyline, however, is the manner in which the story is told, especially its satirical tone, which creates a relationship between the narrator and his tale such that as the narrator tells the story, his comments lead us to hear another, contradictory, voice calling into question much of what he affirms and indeed all forms of authority, and creating a critical distance informing the novel as a
whole. An illustration of this can be found at the very beginning of the novel, where the narrator discusses the suggestion that Mangaraj is perhaps not as pious as he might seem, that he does not fast as he pretends to do on holy days:

Just the other afternoon, though, Mangaraj’s barber, Jaga, let it slip that on the evenings of ekadasi a large pot of milk, some bananas, and a small quantity of khai and nabata are placed in the master’s bedroom. Very early the next morning, Jaga removes the empty pot and washes it. Hearing this, some people exchanged knowing looks and chuckled. One blurted out, “Not even the father of Lord Mahadeba can catch a clever fellow stealing a drink when he dips under the water.” We’re not absolutely sure what was meant by this, but our guess is that these men were slandering Mangaraj. Ignoring their intentions for the moment, we would like to plead his case as follows: Let the eye-witness who has seen Mangaraj emptying the pot come forward, for like judges in a court of law we are absolutely unwilling to accept hearsay and conjecture as evidence. All the more so since science textbooks state unequivocally that liquids evaporate. Is milk not a liquid? Why should milk in a zamindar’s household defy the laws of science? Besides, there were moles, rats, and bugs in his bedroom. And in whose house can mosquitoes and flies not be found? Like all base creatures of appetite, these are always on the lookout for food; such creatures are not spiritually minded like Mangaraj, who had the benefit of listening to the holy scriptures. It would be a great sin, then, to doubt Mangaraj’s piety or sincere devotion. Such is our firm belief.

In this passage, the mere accumulation and juxtaposition of arguments, supposedly in Mangaraj’s favour, serve to discredit him; in the end, readers are led to associate him with the moles, rats, bugs, mosquitoes and flies with which he shares his bedroom. The satirical tone of the passage, targeting not only Mangaraj but the judges in the law courts and legal proceedings, where lies can become truth and truth can be ignored, and even the texts of science and holy scripture, is a constant feature of the novel, which takes aim at all forms of authority and most especially those whose power oppresses the weak.

The novel presents the theme of loss, in its many forms, but more specifically—and this is what ties the novel to the colonial context—loss as a direct result of the manipulation of the legal system. Mangaraj manages to gain control of Ali Mian’s land by loaning him money (revenues he obtained from Ali Mian’s own zamindari, in fact), knowing full well that Ali Mian will default on repayment; he tricks Bhagia and Saria into forfeiting their six acres and thirty-two decimals by exploiting their naïveté and lack
of experience with legal documents; and finally, Mangaraj himself loses everything when he is condemned for stealing Bhagia and Saria's cow, and is reduced to signing over all his possessions to his lawyer, Ram Ram Lala, in the vain hope that in this way he might be able to conserve them. What is particularly significant in all these instances is the way in which land changes hands, involving very often the (mis)application of the law. As John V. Boulton points out in his work on Fakir Mohan, the use of the legal system to determine ownership and facilitate the transmission of property was something new in nineteenth-century India and a direct result of British colonization. Land had always been the principal source of power in Oriya society, but previously it had not been exchanged. As a result, "before the coming of the British ... the mercantile classes had been gaining increasing social importance, but had, up to then, failed to secure any real power. By a change in the tenancy laws the British enabled the mercantile classes to invest their fortunes in land" (1993, 393). The accumulation of land by Mangaraj, as well as its subsequent loss, should thus be seen as a specific and, for the narrator, distinctly negative result of colonial occupation. This is made clear through the contrast between Mangaraj and the Baghasinghs, traditional zamindars now living on the edge of poverty, but still retaining their autocratic and feudal ways. Mangaraj's success in destroying what remains of their property and power, through Champa's trickery, only serves to further accentuate the evils the author associates with modern, that is, colonial, times.

Yet another form of dispossession presented in the novel relates to language and culture. Contact with the British is considered to have had negative effects upon education and social practices in Orissa. To quote from Boulton again: "the exposure of Hinduism to the challenge of Christianity and Western scepticism weakened the respect of the young for their parents, caste councils and religious faith; morality declined among the Western-educated; and in towns alien vices were indulged" (497). This theme of degeneration is reiterated throughout the novel especially through the references to the "babus," a term mixing both respect and contempt, and enabling the narrator to maintain his ironic distance. Thus the following passage from the novel:

As for us, it is not that we do not know how to describe the beauty of a heroine. Consider how ridiculously easy it is. According to classical literary techniques, all one has to do is find parallels between specific attributes of our heroine Champa and different fruits, such as bananas, jack-fruits, or mangoes, and common trees, leaves, and flowers. But such old-fashioned methods are no longer suitable; for our English-educated babus we now have to adopt an English style. Indian poets usually compare the gait of a beautiful woman to that of
an elephant. The babus frown on such a comparison; they would rather the heroine "galloped like a horse." The way English culture is rushing in like the first floods of the river Mahanadi, we suspect that our newly educated and civilized babus will soon appoint whip-cracking trainers to teach their gentle female companions to gallop.

These same babus, the narrator tells us, "are educated; they have studied and have mastered profundities." But, he continues, "Ask a new babu his grandfather's father's name and he will hem and haw, but the names of the ancestors of England's Charles the Third will readily roll off his tongue. To be considered a scholar, it is necessary to have read about the English and the French; there is no point in learning about oneself or one's neighbour." These westernized, English-learning, English-educated, modern (all adjectives used in the text) babus have divorced themselves from their own history and culture. They identify completely with the colonizers in an attempt at assimilation, itself a form of dispossession, which the narrator satirizes by ironically adding his own voice to theirs, thereby underscoring the extent to which the babus have lost touch with their own identity and see themselves only through the eyes of the other. The narrator notes:

Today, in our nineteenth century, the sciences enjoy great prestige, for they form the basis of all progress. See, the British are white-skinned whereas Oriyas are dark in complexion. This is because the former have studied the sciences, whereas the latter have no knowledge of these.

None of the three published translations of the novel reproduce these sentences, as if such a claim, in an English version of the novel, might possibly be taken at face value, and the narrator perceived as identifying with the colonizers and espousing their position as his own. Here, the narrator uses a claim about the effects of science to make mockery of other equally outrageous beliefs at the very heart of the colonial project. In the published English translations, however, the narrator's irony disappears, along with the critique.

The Translations

The three published translations of Chha Mana Atha Guntha differ radically from one another. Their additions, simplifications and deletions reflect the different purposes the translators set for themselves, their different "translation projects" (see Berman 1995, 76-79), which find expression in the accompanying notes, prefaces and comments, as well as in the translations themselves. The differences between the three translations, published
under similar conditions —within three years of each other, in India, and by
Indian publishers—should caution us against concluding too quickly, from
individual cases, about the ways representations of colonialism are trans-
formed through translation in the postcolonial period. Indeed, the transla-
tions demonstrate that colonial values and hierarchies continue to produce
effects in the postcolonial period in various, and even contradictory, ways.

**Six Acres and a Half (1967)**

In their one-page translators’ note to the “English edition” of the novel, the
Senapatis express their hope that “this great novel should reach a wider
circle of readers among people not acquainted with the Oriya language”
(8). Clarifying their purpose in producing the translation, a purpose which
they define less in literary than in social and political terms, they continue:

> We have made the English translation as true to the original as prac-
ticable. We hope this will facilitate, among the reading public of this
vast sub-continent of India, a closer understanding of life in Orissa
in the last century; in so doing it may promote that unified view of
Indian life which is unmistakable in spite of the rich diversity of our
country.

The projected readership for whom the translation is produced is
explicitly identified as Indian, and the translators’ aim is to demonstrate the
unity which lies behind regional differences of language, culture and reli-
gion. From this respect, it is significant that the translation appeared as a
“National Book Trust Book” under the imprint of the Publications Division
of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India. The
National Book Trust, founded in 1957, was established with the explicit
mandate to promote national integration and unity through its different col-
lections, often through translation (see St-Pierre 1998). That the cause of
Indian national unity was to be furthered through translation into English, a
language accessible to only a small minority of the population, may seem
paradoxical, but this paradox reflects the ambiguous role English has in
post-Independence India. Precisely because of its use by the educated elites,
English was considered the language in which literary works could, in 1967,
reach the widest audience within India itself. For although Hindi had been
identified as the sole national language—English being accorded associates-
language status—the geographical and even religious tensions surrounding
the use of Hindi were still very strong at the time, and indeed had led to the
delay in the implementation of constitutional provisions regarding its ex-
clusive use as national language.\(^{11}\) English was in a certain sense the more
acceptable, the more “neutral” of the two languages.\(^{12}\) In addition, English
had, and still retains, the function of a link language in India. The sheer
number of languages in the country (1,652 according to the 1961 census)
requires that certain languages—most notably English and Hindi—be given a *de facto* privileged position and be used to compensate for the lack of translators for other languages, including the eighteen languages officially recognized in Schedule VIII of the Indian Constitution. Translation from one of these languages into English makes texts available for translation into other Indian languages.

But, in reality, the Senapatis' translation of *Chha Mana Atha Guntha* is not aimed only at "the reading public of the vast sub-continent of India," as stated by the translators, since publications by the Publications Division of the Government of India receive wide distribution outside India. The promotion of a certain vision of India and of Indian life was thus not purely for internal consumption; rather, the translation was also to have a representative function, to serve as an example of the true nature of India for foreigners. This double-intended readership is reflected in the terms contained in the glossary, which includes not only "[t]erms and expressions which are local or bear the stamp of local atmosphere" (8), but also those which would be familiar to the majority of Indian readers, but require explanation for foreign readers, for example, the names of the months of the Hindu calendar (Aswina, Bhadra, Chaitra, etc.), days of religious observance (ekadasi, jamastami), forms of address (Saant, Saantani) and so forth. The translation is given the purpose of bridging the gap between the local and the national, as well as of demonstrating the possibility of attaining unity at the national level through the use of English, making evident India's status as a separate, independent and cohesive state. The "unified view of Indian life" that the translation is to promote is intended for readers both inside and outside the country, the double imprint of the translation underscoring the Janus-like function it is to fulfill.

In addition to the glossary and their "Note," the translators supply two footnotes in the text. The first comes at the very beginning of the novel: "Ramchandra Mangaraj was a mofussil* Zamindar." The gloss on "mofussil" reads as follows: "That is to say, living in the countryside, unlike many big (absentee) landlords who lived in the metropolis, Calcutta, or at least in big towns like Cuttack." The gloss not only provides a precise meaning for "mofussil" ("living in the countryside..."), but also underscores the implied contrast between country and city, between centre and periphery. Two types of zamindars are evoked: those who live on their lands in the countryside, and the absentee landlords who live in the cities, more specifically, in the administrative areas of the colony: Calcutta (Bengal)—the seat of British power—and Cuttack (Orissa)—the administrative centre for the region.

Allusion is being made here to the fundamental shift in Indian society already referred to, brought about by the British through their modification of the legal system, and more specifically, of the ownership of property.
independent newspapers were being published in several variants of Malay in the larger polyglot coastal cities. These papers were owned and operated by *peranakan* (semi-assimilated ethnic Chinese), Eurasians and Dutch private citizens. Their straightforward reporting brought new possibilities for the kinds of stories that could be told in Malay: for example, a story could be brought down out of the fantastic world and made to operate in the here and now. While literacy was still uncommon, those who could read had access to factual narrative, as well as serialized stories in the independent press. Thus began the leap in development from the oral mode and the ideal, semi-religious setting of *wayang* and some forms of *hikayat*, to the realism of modern Indonesian written literature.

As literacy increased, the independent press began publishing books in various variants of Malay, for the language was native to at least three populations: the Batavians (i.e., Jakartans), *peranakan* and certain groups on Sumatra, which is close to Malaysia. Book prices were low; publishers expected that books would be read aloud to an audience. Two main types of books were published: prose translations of great Chinese verse classics, whose audience was the *peranakan*, who were interested in Chinese culture, but who did not read Chinese; and thrillers written in Malay, which were just as improbable perhaps as the older epics and legends, but set in present-day cities and liberally sprinkled with sex and violence. The thrillers were intended for an audience seeking distraction; the violence was usually quite graphic, characters were oversimplified, the supernatural figured prominently in the plots and coincidence was rampant. The plot of *Seitang-Koening*, a thriller written by Raden Mas Tirto Adhi Soerjo, a journalist whose title suggests that he was a member of one of the princely families of Java, is summarized by C.W. Watson (1971): a *njai* (native wife or mistress of a Dutchman) is blackmailed into sleeping with an Arab to whom she is in debt. At the critical moment, however, they are interrupted by the Dutchman bearing a rifle, who in turn extorts a large sum of money from the Arab. Hilarity ensues. The language and independent nature of these productions made them antithetical to the colonial government of the time, and spurred the foundation of Balai Pustaka as a corrective measure.

In their role as colonizer, the Dutch saw themselves as different from the larger European powers. As C. van Eerde (1914) explained in "Omgang me inlander":

When history calls upon small nations to engage with energy and intelligence in the demanding work of empire, a little country such as Holland provides better guarantees than larger nations to implement the appropriate policies. Bigger European countries have a proclivity to use brute force in colonial administration—a blunt vio-
remains, it will be impossible for Orissa to progress” (in Boulton 1993, 71). Thus, in Orissa, the perceived threat came less directly from the colonizers per se than from other Indians—the absentee landlords, Calcutta, as well as administrative centres such as Cuttack—those who, because of their proximity to the centres of power, were able to position themselves between the colonizers and their subjects, and reap the benefits.

The Stubble Under the Cloven Hoof (1967)

A second translation of Chha Mana Atha Guntha, by C.V. Narasimha Das, also appeared in 1967, accompanied by a variety of prefatory texts, including a dedication, a “Publisher’s Note,” a text—“The Author to the Reader”—written by the translator, an “Acknowledgement” and a nineteen-page “Introduction.” The dedication clearly states the purpose of the translation: “Dedicated to All the ill-paid Indian teachers of English who smile sceptically at Research in English studies in India, but believe passionately in harnessing the English language to deliver the national goods of which Research usually knows nothing.” Translation into English is presented here as fulfilling the true role allotted to English in India, that of going beyond the boundaries erected by the foundation of Indian states along linguistic lines, and of delivering “the national goods” (emphasis added). Once again the opposition between regional and national is alluded to, mirroring that between the Indian vernaculars and the English language.

The translation is presented as a rewriting of the original work—a sort of “old wine in new bottles”—as a recasting in terms of modern consciousness (iii), and is almost three times as long as the other published versions. Dr. Johnson’s remarks on Pope’s translation of The Iliad are quoted in support of the undertaking to continue the creative process, to recreate in English rather than to merely translate. As the translator himself notes in “The Author to the Reader”: “Fakir Mohan himself, I fancy, would have written something vitally like this book if he had come to write in English today. He would have poured his genius, which chiefly means his hilarity, into such an English mould as this; and a star would then have risen in the firmament of Indo-Anglian fiction” (i). Through the translation, Fakir Mohan loses his regional and vernacular ties and becomes an Indian author writing directly in English, a transformation which is not unproblematic given his marking in the novel of separate linguistic and cultural spaces. Signing as the author, the translator considers his work an illustration of his “faith that English literature can enrich an Indian vernacular tale by teaching him who retells it in English the art of rechristening its thought and imagery and giving it an Indo-Anglian domicile in the commonwealth of letters” (iii). As a result his translation and rewriting of the original work “symbolically
amounts to the cultivation of a literary habit which the role of the English language in New India seems to call for” (iii). In post-Independence India, English is to be less an object of academic study than a tool which can be used to create links beyond the particularisms of the vernaculars, making possible a certain unity at the national level.

In his “Introduction” to the novel, Das emphasizes the importance of the colonial heritage, and specifically “the dignity and nobility of the British Indian jurisprudence which we, the citizens of Independent India of today, have received as an invaluable heritage from the British rule” (iii). This is not the sole heritage of colonial times, however, for just as socialist thinkers in India wish to appropriate English-held property as national property, so too the translator wants to call national “the bridge named the English language” (vi).

Through a quotation added by the translator on the inside title page: “I am a fond father to every child of my fancy,” the novel is placed under the auspices of Charles Dickens; and a passage, also added by the translator, from Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, begins the first chapter of the novel and serves to make explicit the moral of the tale. The lesson to be learned is in fact amply clear in the novel itself and the decision to quote Shakespeare has symbolic rather than semantic importance, coming as it does from a professor of English Studies in India. As Harish Trivedi has written, the reaction to Shakespeare’s texts in India is a litmus test for the colonial and postcolonial relations between Britain and India. Through the addition of quotations heading the chapters, the novel in Das’s translation comes to serve as an illustration of passages from the most important authors of the Western canon of English literature: Dickens, Shakespeare, Dryden, Spenser, Swift and so forth. By supplementing Fakir Mohan’s work with such quotations, the translator is attempting to ensure its literary worth. At the same time, however, through such references, the old hierarchies between the merely regional or national, on the one hand—of which Indo-Anglian literature and Indian literature in English translation are but two examples—and that which can claim universal appeal, on the other, are maintained.

In the opening passage of Das’s version of the novel, cultural difference is handled in a number of ways: it is explained—“there are twenty-four Ekadsai [sic] days”; adapted—“over eight long miles around,” where “miles” translates *kos*, an Indian measure of distance; elided—the term *mofussil* has no equivalent in the translation; or defined—“the Tulasi leaf, (that is, the Indian basil).” And while certain of the additions made by the translator are references to specifically Indian realities, they are no sooner used than explained or defined: “the Samant (we mean Mangaraj himself
by this title of gentility)” or “every Dwadasi day, that is, the day following the Ekadasi.” Allusions which might not be understood by non-Hindu readers—for example, “One blurted out, ‘Even the father of Lord Mahadeva can’t catch a clever fellow stealing a drink of water after dipping into it’”—are amplified in the translation:

One of them, an accomplished wag, was even heard to say that if you dive under water for a holy ablution ostensibly to inaugurate an Ekadasi fast and then choose to quaff perfidiously under cover of water, even Lord Mahadev who, with his all-surveying eye, is believed to be infallibly omniscient will never be able to know and punish your sub-aquatic profanity. (2)

Here, one line of story grows to five lines of explanation. Also, as the opening chapter of the novel progresses, references are added to, among other things, English Common Law, Section 60 of the “Indian Evidence Act,” Oliver Twist, Dr. Johnson, the Gospel of Saint John and Wordsworth’s “Michael.” None of these appear in the original text.

Who is Das writing for? At first it would seem that the translation has been produced for British readers, considering the references to the literature of Great Britain, added by the translator, and the explanations of Hindu customs and practices incorporated into the body of the translation. Working against such a hypothesis, however, are a certain number of indices pointing to a primarily Indian readership. First among these is the nature of the translation itself, with its additions and amplifications. Its transformation of the original text sets it squarely within the Indian tradition of “transcreation.”17 In addition, the decision to publish the translation in Cuttack makes it unlikely that it would be read elsewhere than in Orissa, or even there, since locally published works tend to quickly disappear, as has this translation, which is now unobtainable. Two conflicting sets of indications, then, reflect both the colonial origins of the use of English in India and its status within Independent India. The translation is dedicated to “All the ill-paid Indian teachers of English,” and like them, the translation combines elements from two traditions while belonging entirely to neither.

A Plot of Land (1969)

The third translation, by Nuri Misra, was published in 1969 by a local publisher in Orissa. In his brief “Preface” Misra insists on the importance of the original work and its author, while at the same time situating his translation within the Indian tradition of “transcreation”:

“A Plot of Land” has been rewritten from the original Oriya social novel “Chha Mana Atha Guntha” by Fakir Mohan Senapati.
Considered by most to be the greatest storyteller and grand old poet of Orissa, Fakir Mohan was also a prince of novel writing in the Oriya language. He published the novel in the year 1902, when it took the literary world by storm. (Emphasis added)

He places emphasis on the social nature of the novel and its "realistic picture of the contemporary society" with its "greedy landlords," "corrupt policemen" and "unscrupulous lawyers" as well as on the moral implications of the tale: "how greed can bring about a man's ultimate downfall."

The translator describes his work as "an easy reader," produced for those "for whom English is a second language," and given the publisher of the translation, the readers referred to can be presumed to be Indian. For English-as-a-second-language readers then, the translator places in italics and includes in the glossary accompanying the translation "terms which are local and very much associated with the spirit of the novel." But in the case of this translation, too, doubt arises as to the intended readership, since the glossary includes definitions of such pan-Indian terms as Brahmin, lathi, pan, puja and tulsi, in addition to various weights, measures and units of currency, some specific to Orissa (guntha, mana) others not (krosa, maund, seer). The inclusion in the glossary of the English word mile makes it even more difficult to determine the intended readership, since it is unlikely that many would require an explanation of such a common word. In the end, what characterizes this translation is less a well-defined readership than a certain level of mastery of the English language that the readers are expected to possess.

* * *

These different "translation projects," and the translations themselves, result both from the way in which the translators defined their potential readerships, and from their relation to the English language. The translation by the Senapatis is aimed at both a national and an international audience, and its purpose is to provide an example of what it means to be "Indian." The one by C.V. Narasimha Das attempts to make the novel Indo-Anglian, considering this denial of its regional and vernacular origins a homage to its greatness. By making the translation into an Indian novel in English, integrable into the larger context of English (i.e., British) literature, the translator hopes to ensure its recognition. Finally, the translation by Nuri Misra is attributed an essentially pedagogical function; it is hoped that by reading an Indian vernacular novel in English translation, readers will be able to improve their command of English. The main function of this translation then is not to make the novel available to readers unable to read Oriya, but rather to make the English language itself available to them.
All three translations raise the question of the relation of Indian vernaculars to English, and the status of English both as a quasi-indigenous language of India and as a foreign, international language. While ensuring that the novel will be read by a wider audience, the translations also raise the question of the cost of such wider availability. If it is likely that educated readers, even those whose mother tongue is Oriya, will read *Chha Mana Atha Guntha* in English translation, what effect does translation into English have on the use and survival of Indian languages as such? Does the confusion which seems to exist with regard to the potential readers for the translations reflect another confusion which English introduces—being both an Indian and a foreign language—between the regional, the national and the international, where the diversity of the regional is denied in the attempt to construct a nation, and where one of the important tools in the construction of an independent nation is an instrument of domination? These questions relating to the functions and hierarchies of languages are given prominence through the process of translation itself; they are also directly addressed in *Chha Mana Atha Guntha*, which is why translation into English becomes in this case particularly significant.

Language(s)

Returning now to *Chha Mana Atha Guntha*, let us examine the passage describing the rise in fortune of Ali Mian, from whom Mangaraj was to fraudulently obtain the zamindari, the source of his subsequent wealth. Here the fortunes of both individuals, as well as the languages referred to—Sanskrit, Persian, English—are tied directly to colonialism. Ali Mian’s situation, for example, improved significantly after the local British administrator bought a horse from him; because he was pleased with his purchase, he appointed Mian police inspector. His rapid ascent in the world is described thus in the translation by Rabi Shankar Mishra et. al.:

(A) In the past, the Persian language had been held in high favor; it was the language of the court. With a sharp and pitiless pen God has inscribed a strange fate for India; yesterday, the language of the court was Persian, today it is English. Only He knows which language will follow tomorrow. Whichever it may be, we know for certain that Sanskrit lies crushed beneath a rock for ever. English pundits say, “Sanskrit is a dead language.” We would go even further, “Sanskrit is the language of the half-dead.” Anyhow, our Mian got a job through the Sahib’s mercy; he was now a thana daroga. He survived in this job for thirty years without much trouble, and during that time amassed considerable property. During these years he acquired four zamindaris and built himself a big house; he owned farms and
gardens and a large number of household goods. In those days, the zamindaris of Orissa were auctioned off in Calcutta.

In this passage, the influence and presence of the colonial powers within India are foregrounded. The reference to Persian as the language of the court, its replacement by English, the fate of Sanskrit—as determined by English pundits, Mian’s obtaining a position through the mercy of the Sahib and, finally, the auctioning off of zamindaris in Calcutta, all point to the occupation of India by colonial powers. What happens to these references in the three published translations of the novel will concern us here. Indeed, these references receive different treatment in each translation: from the accentuation of the colonial context in Das’s version to its erasure, to a greater or lesser degree, in the other two.

Here then is the same passage in Das’s translation, where the temporal frame is specified and situated specifically in terms of the British presence in India: “In the past,” at the beginning of passage (A) above, is rendered as “In the dawn of the British rule in our country”; “In those days,” toward the end of the passage, is rewritten as “In the early days of the British Indian Empire.” At the same time, anachronistically, but in keeping with the translator’s identification with the author, the temporal frame is extended into the present through the reference to the “Republic of India”:

(B) In the dawn of the British rule in our country Persian was the queen of languages, because it was the language of the old royalty and of the ruling classes; and so it was chosen for official use in the new British Indian courts of law. How capricious are the fortunes of languages, like those of nations and civilizations! It is the will of the Arbiter of the Destiny of this land of Bharat that Persian should have been the language of the rulers the day before yesterday, that English should have succeeded to that honour yesterday and that Hindi should aspire for the very same honour today in the Republic of India. Heaven only knows what other languages are now waiting in the queue for their turn. But we can confidently say that Sanskrit can never hope to go anywhere near that glorious queue; nor has it ever any business to hope to. Has it not been cast aside as a “dead-language” by learned and wise people in India? Some learned Englishmen themselves have rightly taught our slow Indian thinkers that Sanskrit is a “dead language”. We humbly wish to express this profound discovery a little more decisively and vividly by saying that Sanskrit is the language of feckless, feeble and emasculated people. Whatever it is, let it alone and let us come back to our story.

Under the gracious patronage of the District Sahib of Midnapore the horse-trader, Ali Mian, got a job in the Police Force of Bengal as a
Sub Inspector. After a long and distinguished service for thirty years during which he had been placed in charge of several Police Stations as Officer-in-charge, he acquired considerable fortune and material assets of various kinds. In addition to a great number of buildings, grounds and gardens, and costly and fine furniture, his acquisitions included a big zamindary which comprised of four taluks, each taluk being a bunch of villages and the domains thereof. In the early days of the British Indian Empire, the zamindary estates of Orissa used to be sold by public auction in Calcutta under the orders of the courts of law for default of payment of peishkush, the insolvent zamindars being considered in law as “judgement debtors.”

Typical of this “imaginative recast” of the novel is the fact that this passage is more than twice as long as passage (A) previously cited, and four times as long as the same passage in the other two published versions. Additions have been made, and passages have been expanded; together they account for the greater length. The most notable additions, at least for our purposes, since they link the evolution of India to the history of colonial occupation, are the allusion to the use of Persian in the “new British Indian courts of law,” the reference to Hindi and the Republic of India and the explanation as to why the zamindaris were being auctioned off in Calcutta. Colonial hierarchies are emphasized: Persian, “the language of the court,” is described in the first case as “the language of the old royalty and of the ruling classes,” and in the second, as “the language of the rulers,” thereby highlighting the change in political structures which came about in the colonial era. The adverb “rightly” and the adjective “slow” in the rendering of “English pundits say” as “Some learned Englishmen themselves have rightly taught our slow Indian thinkers,” serve both to reproduce the discourse of the colonizers and to ironically undermine it.

Whereas additions and elaborations characterize Das’s translation, the other two tend to reduce the novel to its bare narrative, dispensing for a large part with comments considered irrelevant or, perhaps more to the point, no longer relevant to the central matter of the novel. Here are the translations of the same passage by the Senapatis (C) and by Nuri Misra (D):

(C) In those days, Persian was the favoured language and it was also the court language. Through the patronage of the European officer, Ali Mian got an appointment as a Police Daroga. During his tenure of service, he worked fairly well; he had, at times, to face many difficulties but he acquired a sizeable property in the 30 years of his service. Besides his residential house, garden and furniture, he acquired four Zamindari estates.

Those were the days when the Zamindari estates of Orissa were being put to auction at Calcutta.
Persian was a popular language in India. Persian was also the court language. But then English replaced it. However, Alimian was given a post of police Daroga by the grace of the Saheb. Alimian then became Miansaheb. Miansaheb served continuously for thirty years and earned a considerable amount of property. Besides his houses, gardens and household materials, he had four Zamindari estates. In olden days, Orissa Zamindari estates were put to auction sale at Calcutta.

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>References to Language(s)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Das (1967)</strong> (B)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian, English</td>
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<tr>
<td>&quot;... Persian was the queen of languages, because it was the language of the old royalty and of the ruling classes; and so it was chosen for official use in the new British Indian courts of law. How capricious are the fortunes of languages, like those of nations and civilizations! It is the will of the Arbiter of the Destiny of this land of Bharat that Persian should have been the language of the rulers the day before yesterday, that English should have succeeded to that honour yesterday and that Hindi should aspire for the very same honour today in the Republic of India. Heaven knows what other languages are now waiting in the queue for their turn.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanskrit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;But we can confidently say that Sanskrit can never hope to go anywhere near that glorious queue; nor has it ever any business to hope to. Has it not been cast aside as a 'dead language' by learned and wise people in India? Some learned Englishmen themselves have rightly taught our slow Indian thinkers that Sanskrit is a 'dead language'. We humbly wish to express this profound discovery a little more decisively and vividly by saying that Sanskrit is the language of the feckless, feeble and emasculated people.&quot;</td>
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A comparison of the three published translations shows that the deletions and/or additions in the passage centre primarily on the question of
language(s). Das specifies and embroiders on their role within India, and their identification with the centres of power. The other translators, however, reduce references to language to a bare minimum, even eliminating all reference to Sanskrit. Table 1 above shows the differences between the three translations in this respect.

The translation by the Senapatis omits all reference to English and Sanskrit, as well as to the succession of languages, and the possibility that the dominance of English is merely temporary. Misra’s translation also does not mention the status of Sanskrit, and neutrally notes that English has replaced Persian, without conjecturing on the future. On the other hand, Das’s translation, as we have seen, not only stresses the replacement of one language by another in the past, it brings us to the present where, indeed, English has a rival in Hindi, and suggests that Hindi is simply one more in this chain of languages, likely also to be replaced at some future point in time. Das is the sole translator, in the case of the published versions, to include remarks on Sanskrit, which take aim both at the Orientalist English scholars proclaiming Sanskrit a dead language, and at the Brahmins, characterized here as weak and feeble.

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrator’s Presence</th>
<th>Das (1967) (B)</th>
<th>Senapatis (1967) (C)</th>
<th>Misra (1969) (D)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrator’s presence</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“How capricious are the fortunes of languages, like those of nations and civilizations!”</td>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“Heaven only knows what other languages are now waiting in the queue for their turn. But we can confidently say…”</td>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Some learned Englishmen themselves have rightly taught our slow Indian thinkers that…”</td>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We humbly wish to express this profound discovery…”</td>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Whatever it is, let it alone and let us come back to our story.”</td>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td>Omitted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another type of modification brought about in the passage by the Senapatis and by Misra should also be noted here, since it has important consequences for the tone of the narrative and the ironic distance the narrator maintains from his tale. The self-conscious references the narrator makes to himself and to his story are lessened in both of these translations, thereby eliminating the layering of narrative voices, and weakening the critical and satirical tone of the novel. As Table 2 above indicates, the narrator’s presence is completely eliminated in their translations of the passage under examination.
The Language of the Law

Finally, let us turn to a passage of the novel which sets the scene for Mangaraj's trial for the murder of Saria, and at which in the end he is condemned for the theft of a cow:

The Sessions Court in Cuttack was very crowded. People from all over—government offices, the bazaar, the weekly market—had come to witness the trial. Just as an audience gathers for a badi pala hours before the singers are ready, a crowd filled up the courtroom long before the trial was to begin. It was a large crowd, and there was a lot of noise. Two chaprassis were shouting, "Quiet! Quiet!" adding to the confusion. A powerful rural zamindar was being tried for murder. The magistrate had referred the case to the Sessions Court. The hearing had been going on for five days now, and today was to be the last. It had not yet started. Tomorrow was Wednesday, the day on which mail for England was dispatched. The judge Sahib was hurriedly writing a letter, which began, "My dear Lady." Whenever a criminal case was scheduled to be heard, the Sahib would open an English newspaper and read it, or leisurely write a letter, leaving everything else to the peshkar. All he did was sign the documents recording the depositions of the witnesses and pronounce the judgment. But today the Sahib was doing everything himself, because today's main witness [the civil surgeon for the district] was an Englishman; he would also have to write out the judgement in English. It was as if everything in the court today was Englished. But we are Oriyas, and so are our readers, and the printing presses here have only Oriya type. Thus, we have translated everything into Oriya.

In this passage, reference is made to what at first seem two distinct, and very clearly opposed, geographical spaces, each characterized by its own language. The first space is that of England and English, a space which in terms of the action of the novel is at once foreign and domestic. The colonizers introduced into India not only their legal and medical systems (represented here by the judge and the civil surgeon), but also imposed their language. In this passage the reference to the English language is a sign of the foreign space which empowers those in some way connected to it—through their very Englishness—and which confirms the inferior status of those who are not. This is the sense of the judge sahib's habitual behaviour whenever a criminal case is to be heard: he "opens an English newspaper and reads it, or leisurely writes a letter." Despite these activities divorcing him from the reality of the case under trial, he nevertheless carries out his functions as the representative of the colonial power, signing the depositions of the witnesses and pronouncing the judgment in English. In this
depiction, the British system of law and the domestic situation to which the law is applied are kept clearly separated, the second being handed over to the native subordinate (the “peshkar”) and the first remaining firmly within the control of the British official (the “judge”). And it becomes clear from what takes place on this particular occasion, with the “Englishing” of “everything in the court,” that the separation of functions and languages also implies the superiority of the foreign over the domestic.

The presence of one English witness is sufficient for the proceedings to take place in English, and for the judge to feel that he should take an active role in the trial. This witness, the Civil Surgeon for the district of Cuttack, introduced as Dr. A.B.C.D. Douglas, son of E.F.G.H. Douglas, is, like the judge, a colonial official, and this simple fact should be confirmation enough of his qualifications and the reliability of his testimony. Reacting somewhat testily at one point during the interrogation, Dr. Douglas blurts out, in defense of the accuracy and truth of his deposition: “We have been a Civil Surgeon for over ten years now. Before then we were in the military department. We studied medicine at a London college and obtained our degree from there.” Because he is a British official, Douglas feels that his word should not be questioned by a mere Indian prosecutor or lawyer. The priority of the English space over the Oriya (Indian) space is thus established clearly, at least in the minds of the colonial officials, for, in fact, this priority is undermined by the ironic distance the narrator maintains from the proceedings.

The second space is that of India, more specifically Orissa, and Oriya. While the last two sentences of the passage make this very explicit, the presence of this space can be felt throughout, beginning with the location of the Sessions Court in Cuttack. Allusion to the badi pala, and lexical items such as chaprassis, zamindar, sahib and peshkar are all indices of this space, one which is systematically devalorized. The markers of “Oriyaness” are also markers of inferiority: the chaprassis, by shouting “Quiet! Quiet!” comically produce the opposite effect from that desired, and at the same time mirror an English court clerk’s “Oyez, Oyez” calling the court to order; the trial itself is compared to a trivial musical performance, which the crowd attends purely for entertainment; it is the peshkar, an Oriya, who replaces his superior, the British judge sahib, in trials which involve only natives.

But this hierarchy of spaces and languages is not one espoused by the narrator, and this is the significance of the last two lines of the passage: “But we are Oriyas, and so are our readers, and the printing presses here have only Oriya type. Thus we have translated everything into Oriya.” This act of translation by the narrator mirrors the “Englishing” of everything in the court on this occasion, and like it is a reflection of the power language
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can have within a particular context. Just as everything in the court is Englished, so too everything in the novel is translated into Oriya. And what justifies such an act of translation? The fact that "we are Oriyas." In other words, it is this particular geographical space, precisely in its difference and distance from Britain, which requires that everything be translated into Oriya, the language of the people. The textualization of the trial scene in the original novel is thus itself already a translation—from English into Oriya—a translation made necessary by the dominant British colonial presence in Orissa, and which marks this presence as foreign, a translation carried out to preserve a certain commonality of experience and community (hence, "we are Oriyas") in the face of and against this presence. It is this act of translation into Oriya which enables the narrator's voice to be heard above and through the clash of different languages.

In this translation of Chha Mana Atha Guntha into English, however, everything, or almost everything—and here the degree to which contextual markers have been effaced is important—has been back-translated, so to speak, so that now the narrator is saying, in English, that everything has been translated into Oriya. In this paradox, there is a reversal in the recounting of what takes place in the courtroom when the English witness is to be heard, since in the translation, English becomes, or at the very least represents, Oriya, the language of the original, the language into which the author had already translated everything. And in this translation back into the English of the Oriya, which is already a translation from the English, hierarchies shift in a fundamental way. What comes through in these acts of translation is a certain reciprocity between languages, a potential for equality, an abolition of the hierarchies. It is precisely the possibility of translating—the taking on of the power and the privilege which can accompany the act of translation (for not all translation is a sign of inferiority)—which is figured here by the narrator's act of translation for the members of his community, an individual act that gives power to a community connected through language, an anticolonial act undermining the colonizers' refusal to translate certain texts, contexts and situations into native languages, and contradicting the colonizers' use of translation as a modality of appropriation when it suits them.

How do these different spaces and languages and their interaction fare when the novel is translated into English? Without exception, the three published translations eliminate all reference to the "Englishing" of everything in the court that day, and to the subsequent necessity of translating everything into Oriya for diffusion to the community. This is perhaps not too surprising in the case of the translations by the Senapatis and by Misra—since omission and compression seem to be the basic translation strategies of these two versions; it is more surprising, however, in the case of Das's
translation, which usually—and the treatment of this passage is no exception—expands on the original, almost beyond recognizable bounds. In Das’s translation, the sentence “Two chaprassis were shouting ‘Quiet! Quiet!’ adding to the commotion” begins with a description of the two “liveried orderlies,” as he calls them, and goes on to describe the vendors and lawyers doing business outside the courtroom, under the banyan tree. Thus, ten words in a quite literal translation somehow grow to more than 300 in Das’s version. Nonetheless, despite this rewriting and amplification of the original, his translation contains no reference to the “Englishness” of the court proceedings, nor to the need to translate these into Oriya, the language of the original text.

In fact, what is problematic for the translators of the three published versions is the reference, in the last few lines of the passage, to translation itself and to the Oriya and English languages in their roles as target and source. For, foregrounding as they do the very process of translation in this scene, and more specifically its implications in terms of power and community, the passage and these sentences in particular—coming at the end of the courtroom scene, and underscoring as it were the foreignness of the proceedings—become untranslatable. The information contained in these sentences renders translation visible as “translation,” and situates it within a larger process of “practices of displacement” (Clifford 1997, 3), of transactions between cultures, transactions permeated with inequality, but transactions nonetheless, not determined once and for all by the colonial, or postcolonial, situation as such. The agency the narrator has here is specifically that of translator, whose voice is heard through the very act of translating for readers, who like him are Oriyas. Insofar as such translation enters into contradiction with colonial hierarchies and priorities, particularly those which have survived India’s Independence, its very visibility becomes problematic.

Conclusion

At the very heart of Chha Mana Ata Guntha lies the colonial system and the changes it brought to Indian society, notably in terms of the legal system and in the relations between the Indian vernaculars, as well as in the relations between these vernaculars and the language of the colonizers. As we have seen, language and law were two of the principal modalities of appropriation used by the British in their conquest of India. These same modalities figure prominently in the novel. It is through the manipulation of the legal system and property ownership—both British-established and imposed systems—that Mangaraj’s rise becomes possible; the same legal system, however, brings about his ruin when he is condemned not for the murder of
Saria (for which he was being tried), nor for trickery and deceit used in obtaining the six acres and thirty-two decimals referred to in the title of the novel, but for being in possession of Saria and Bhagia’s prize possession, their cow. In terms of natural law and justice, Managaraj’s end is richly deserved, but at the same time it makes a mockery of the legal system instituted by the British.

Intertwined with the law is the question of language, and of the alienation a foreign tongue can create within a culture, especially when this language is associated with domination and exclusion. Such is the case here; the English language is identified with a loss of identity, and with hierarchies marking and maintaining the colonized as inferior. And this is not the case for English only, but also for any language—such as Bengali—associated with the centre of colonial power.

The three translations of Chha Mana Atha Guntha result from quite different strategies on the part of the translators. Published within two years of each other—between 1967 and 1969—all three by Oriyas and all published in India, the translations, by their differences, point to the complexity of postcolonial situations, and in particular that of India. The colonial legacy “lives on,” albeit profoundly modified, in diverse ways in postcolonial times. This is perhaps most obvious, in India, with regard to English itself and the conflicting attitudes to which it gives rise. The three published translations demonstrate the possibility of quite different, even contradictory, effects produced in what could be considered, at least from a certain distance, as the same context. For example, it is Das’s translation which most clearly focusses on the colonial experience, and more specifically the negative aspects of this experience. Other indications, however, would lead us to situate this translation most squarely within the colonial tradition itself, considering the addition of epigraphs in the form of quotations from English classics at the head of each chapter, the inclusion in the body of the translation of references to English literature which are absent from the original text and, finally, the frame of reference in the translator’s “Introduction” for discussion of the novel. Here is how Das discusses his choice of a title for his translation, abolishing all distinctions and the very hierarchies which the novel itself explores:

I wonder sometimes why I did not choose to call my book “Man of Property” after John Galsworthy. That title would have been quite appropriate—as appropriate, I believe, as the one that my book actually bears now. So far as their passionate attachment to property is concerned, what is the difference between Soames Forsyte [sic] (that unhappy husband of Irene) and Ramachandra Mangaraj? I could similarly call my book by the alternative name of “A Book of Rascals” after Thackeray’s “A Book of Snobs.” (xiii)
But the co-existence within the novel of contradictory voices and strategies needs to be maintained in translation, as does the variety of colonial experiences presented here—both those which are classically considered as such in India (i.e., the Moghul and the British empires), and those which are so by association (e.g., the relations with Bengal, but also the relation to Brahminical power). Whereas the other two published translations quite systematically flatten the irony and defuse the satire, Das's heightens them and makes them explicit, undercutting the references to British literature and culture which he himself has added. Neither solution is completely satisfactory insofar as the first erases and the second exaggerates the different voices, both strategies having the effect of simplifying complexities and reducing ambiguities. The great achievement of Pakir Mohan is precisely his ability to demonstrate, with subtlety and nuance, the effects of the use and abuse of power. If, as the narrator of Chha Mana Atha Guntha claims, lawyers are able to make black white and white black, then what the narrator wishes to show is the world, and more specifically Orissa under British colonial rule, in its shades of grey.

Notes

1. I would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Canada, for its support, which has made research on this topic possible.

2. See St-Pierre (1997). Most general studies on colonialism and postcolonialism comment extensively on their use; see, for example, Loomba (1998), xi-xv and ch. 1.

3. The notion of “India” during the colonial period is highly problematic, projecting upon an amalgam of princely states, territories under British “protection,” and areas under the direct rule of the colonizers, a unity which was not to exist until after 1947.

4. See Masani (1987), 20:

Many Indians believe that truth was the first casualty in the adversarial system of justice which British rules of evidence introduced, with the litigants like rivals in a boxing-ring and the judge as referee. They argue that a more inquisitorial system, with an active, investigating magistrate, might have been better suited to Indian conditions. British justice, with its rigid and impersonal procedures, was certainly alien to a people accustomed to the informal and more intimate disputations of traditional panchayats (village tribunals) or to the role of humble supplicants at princely durbars.

5. Sitakanta Mahapatra (1993), 31, describes the theme of the novel as follows:

Chha Mana Atha Guntha reveals the changes in the land tenure system when land rights slowly passed on to absentee landlords inside the State and sometimes from outside the State. The distant and absentee landlord, devoid of any direct contact with the peasants, the decline of the village artisan and craftsman class and the emergence of a new class of social exploiters in the growing towns, Chha Mana Atha Guntha is a brilliant portrayal of the social transformation in the later half of 19th Century Orissa, the ruthless exploitation of a poor village couple by the rapacious Zamindars.
6. Oriya is one of the eighteen official languages which figure in Schedule VIII of the Indian Constitution. It is spoken primarily in the eastern coastal state of Orissa, and has a long written literary tradition dating back to the tenth century.

7. The phenomenon alluded to here—reading the literature of one's mother tongue in English translation—is on the rise in India. The education of Oriyas in English-language schools, with the prestige and material advantages which come from such an education, is increasingly having the effect of alienating students from their own language. This is the case in other parts of India as well.

8. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from the novel are taken from the translation by Rabi Shankar Mishra et al., presently being prepared for publication.

9. Consider, for example, the following passage from chapter twelve, which describes Asura Pond and the wildlife using it:

Some sixteen to twenty cranes, white and brown, churn the mud like lowly farmhands, from morning till night... A pair of kingfishers suddenly arrive out of nowhere, dive into the water a couple of times, stuff themselves with food, and swiftly fly away. Sitting on the bank, a lone kingfisher suns itself, wings spread like the gown of a memsahib. O stupid Hindu cranes, look at these English kingfishers, who arrive out of nowhere with empty pockets, fill themselves with all manner of fish from the pond, and then fly away. You, you nest in the banyan tree near the pond, but after churning the mud and water all day long, all you get are a few miserable small fish. You are living in critical times now: more and more kingfishers will swoop down on the pond and carry off the best fish.

Immediately after this admonition, the object of the narrator's satire switches to the Brahmins:

The kite is smart and clever; it perches quietly on a branch, like a Brahmin guru, and from there swoops down into the pond to snatch a big fish. That lasts it for the whole day. Brahmin gurus perch on their verandahs, descending on their disciples once a year, like the kite.

10. Yale and Burnell (1990), 44, give the following definition for "baboo":

Properly a term of respect attached to a name, like Master or Mr, and formerly in some parts of Hindustan applied to certain persons of distinction. Its application as a term of respect is now almost or altogether confined to Lower Bengal... In Bengal and elsewhere, among Anglo-Indians, it is often used with a slight savour of disparagement, as characterizing a superficially cultivated, but too often effeminate, Bengali. And from the extensive employment of the class, to which the term was applied as a title, in the capacity of clerks in English offices, the word has come often to signify 'a native clerk who writes English.'

11. The Constitution originally provided that in 1965 Hindi would replace English. The transitional period was, however, extended due to opposition to what was seen as the imposition at the national level of what was in essence a regional, north-Indian language.

12. This is reflected in its choice as official state language in areas where no one major Indian language is predominant (Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura, as well as most of the Union Territories).

13. This contempt for Oriya finds an echo in Chha Mana Atha Guntha in the following description of the Muslim police sub-inspector for Cuttack: "Sheikh Inayat Hosein was a top-class Daroga of Cuttack district. He had a command of Persian. In his view Oriya was the language of idiots; thus he did not write in Oriya and chose to sign
Government papers in Persian only." This passage is edulcorated in the translations by the Senapatis and by Nuri Misra to: "He could not write Oriya as he did not know it" and "He considered Oriya to be a useless language," respectively.

Of the published translations of the novel, only that by C.V. Narasimha Das gives a clear sense of the contempt administrative officials had for native Oriyas:

Of all the Police Sub-Inspectors in the district of Cuttack, Sheik Inayat Hossain was the doyen and was generally esteemed by all competent critics as the pearl of his tribe. His erudition in Persian was profound. It was quite evident to him that Oriya was a paltry language meant for poltroons. It was no better than the drivel of empty-pated Simple Simons. So he would not slight his proud pen by writing it nor would he contaminate the purity of that pen by giving it a taste of that base language. His signature on all official papers therefore flaunted itself invariably in noble Persian characters.

14. The second of the two footnotes in this translation links the development of the legal system to the colonial context. After Mangaraj is convicted of stealing Saria and Bhagia’s cow, his lawyer tells him: "I shall get you acquitted by appealing to the Supreme Court." (99). The gloss explains: "The East India Company had at first established the Sadar Dewani Court at Calcutta. Later on it was converted into the Supreme Court, which was again converted into the High Court subsequently."

15. The translator (Das [1967], i) writes: "There is, however, much in my work which, by design, corresponds to Dr. Johnson’s verdict on Alexander Pope’s English translation of Homer’s Iliad, ‘Homer doubtless owes to his translator many Ovidian graces not exactly suitable to his character; but to have added can be no great crime, if nothing be taken away. Elegance is surely to be desired, if it be not acquired at the expense of dignity.”

16. According to Trivedi (1993), 33-34:

Shakespeare’s status, popularity and dissemination in the post-colonial India of today, nearly half a century after independence, is determined to a large extent by a non-literary factor, just as it was in colonial India. Then it was the Empire; now it is ELT, or the hegemony of English as the pre-eminent international language. English is not only the world language which the whole of the non-English speaking world is under increasing economic and cultural pressure to learn; in India, it is also, because of a post-colonial realisation of the value of our colonially derived advantage in this respect, one of the two [sic] official languages of India, together with Hindi. About 40% of the population knows Hindi and only 2% knows English, but it is this tiny minority which is the privileged, prosperous, decision-making new ruling caste of the country.

17. The term transcreation occurs frequently in the discussion of translation in India, despite no strict definition of what it actually consists in. Paternity of the term is usually attributed to P. Lal, but has recently been claimed by P.K. Saha.

18. In his recent work Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century (1997), James Clifford views "Practices of displacement ... as constitutive of cultural meanings rather than as their simple transfer or extension,” 3.

Works Cited

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