Research Article

The Aesthetics of Untranslation: Lexical Retention and Foreignization in Contemporary Bhasha-to-English Translations

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While translation studies has extensively debated *untranslatability*—often framing the retention of source-language terms as an unavoidable symptom of lexical gaps—less attention has been paid to *untranslation* as a deliberate aesthetic strategy. This article examines the shift from paratextually mediated lexical borrowing in late twentieth-century English translations of Indian regional (*Bhasha*) literatures to confident, unglossed untranslation in early twenty-first-century works. Focusing on how translators retain regional words even when functional English equivalents exist, this study argues that untranslation operates out of a commitment to the sonic charm, affective intimacy, and cultural rhythm of the original text. Synthesizing Western translation taxonomies with postcolonial Indian translation theory, the paper proposes a four-part taxonomy of untranslated items—kinship and social hierarchy, material and sensory culture, affective-philosophical concepts, and acoustic discourse markers—applied through close readings of Bama's *Karukku*[1], Sankar's *Chowringhee*[2], and Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand*[3].

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1. Introduction: From Untranslatability to Strategic Untranslation

1.1. The Deficit Paradigm in Translation Studies and Its Discontents

Within the history of translation studies, the presence of untranslated source-language lexemes inside a target-language text has overwhelmingly been theorized through a vocabulary of structural deficit: *untranslatability*, lexical gaps, semantic voids, and cultural incommensurability[4][5][6]. Under this orthodox lexicographical paradigm, when a literary translator leaves a regional term in its original phonological form—whether the Tamil *kuuzh* (millet porridge), the Bengali *boudi* (elder brother's wife), or the Hindi *samādhi* (yogic trance or entombment)—critical consensus presumes that the target language suffers from an inherent referential lacuna. Lexical retention is consequently diagnosed as a passive symptom of linguistic boundaries, a reluctant concession made by a translator who has exhausted the semantic resources of the target tongue and been forced to borrow out of sheer necessity. Even when contemporary comparative literature elevates the "Untranslatable" into a site of philosophical resistance against global standardization[5][6], the underlying morphology of the term *untranslatability* continues to imply an inherent linguistic incapacity—a property of a word that cannot be translated without catastrophic loss of meaning.

While the deficit model adequately explains strictly metalinguistic or ecological lacunae—such as indigenous flora, fauna, or localized culinary preparations that lack historical nomenclature in Anglo-American English—it fails to account for a pervasive phenomenon in contemporary postcolonial translation practice: the deliberate retention of source-language words where exact, everyday, dictionary-verified equivalents readily exist in the target language. Why does a twenty-first-century translator of Hindi fiction retain *Ma*, *Bade*, *Bahu*, and *Beti* as unitalicized, capitalized proper nouns across a seven-hundred-page novel when English possesses the basic kinship nouns "Mother", "Eldest Son", "Daughter-in-Law", and "Daughter"[3]? Why does a translator of Tamil Dalit life-writing print the appositional phrases "the fear bhayam" and "love paasam"[1], or a translator of Hindi prose write "a deep meditative trance called a samadhi"[3] and "I am the Wishing Tree. I am the Kalpataru"[3], when the English semantic equivalent is already present in the very same sentence? In such instances, the target language clearly

does not suffer from a lexical gap, nor is the translator suffering from an inability to locate an equivalent. Rather, the retention of the source word is a deliberate, elective stylistic intervention.

1.2. Conceptualizing Strategic Untranslation: Agency, Sonic Charm, and Affective Intimacy

To account for this deliberate refusal of semantic substitution, this article proposes a theoretical shift from *untranslatability* to *untranslation* (or *strategic untranslation*). Whereas *untranslatability* denotes a passive structural deadlock, *untranslation* foregrounds active translator agency. It designates the intentional aesthetic, phonetic, and ideological choice to leave a source-language lexeme untranslated in the target text even when functional target-language equivalents are available.

In literary translations from Indian regional languages (*Bhashas*, literally "spoken vernaculars" as distinct from both Sanskrit and colonial English) into English, strategic untranslation is driven by a commitment to what may be termed the aesthetic charm of the original form: its sonic resonance, alliterative and rhyming cadence, relational warmth, and socio-spatial texture. Language in literary fiction does not merely transmit denotative information; it carries an acoustic body and an affective hierarchy. When a *Bhasha* word is replaced by its standard English dictionary equivalent, the logical denotation may survive, but the sensory and emotional lifeworld of the word frequently evaporates. Rendering the Bengali elder-brother suffix *-da* (*Bose-da*, *Sata-da*) as "Mr Bose"[2], the Tamil cry of physical trauma *Ayyo Amma* as "Oh Mother!"[1], the North Indian conversational interjection *arre* as "hey"[3], or the Hindi kinship role *Bahu* as "Daughter-in-Law"[3] flattens vernacular intimacy into clinical, domesticated Anglo-American prose.

Strategic untranslation resists this aesthetic impoverishment. By preserving the phonetic body of the *Bhasha* word inside the English sentence, the translator treats the source lexeme not as an obstacle to fluency, but as an irreplaceable vessel of sonic pleasure and cultural intimacy. Furthermore, when contemporary translators weave untranslated *Bhasha* words into bilingual puns, homophonic rhymes (*Gaya bhi gaya... voh bhi gaya*, playing on the city of Gaya and the Hindi verb *gayā*, "gone"; [3]), or morphological blends (*un-chee chee*, [3]; *Mem-boudi* and *Saheb-dada*, [2]), untranslation ceases to be a defensive preservation of source-culture realia and becomes an active, creative expansion of the English language itself.

1.3. The Sociolinguistic and Publishing Trajectory of Bhasha-to-English Translation (1990s–2020s)

The emergence of strategic untranslation as a confident literary device is inextricably linked to the sociolinguistic and commercial evolution of English translation in India between the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, a trajectory examined in detail by Rita Kothari[7]. During the 1980s and 1990s, systematic institutional and commercial initiatives—most notably Macmillan India's landmark "Modern Indian Novels in Translation" and "Dalit Writing in Translation" series, edited by Mini Krishnan and funded by philanthropic bodies such as the MR. AR. Educational Society[1]—inaugurated a vital national project of translating regional *Bhasha* literatures directly into English. As the sponsors' note to the Macmillan series explicitly observed, the project was conceived "as a means of introducing Indian authors and culture to the outside world, not forgetting that it also makes possible inter-State exchanges for the furtherance of national integration at an imaginative level"[1].

Because late twentieth-century publishing houses envisioned a target readership that included both non-Indian readers and Indian readers unfamiliar with the specific regional culture of another linguistic state[1], translations from this era relied heavily on paratextual mediation. Translators courageously retained indigenous terms to safeguard regional, ecological, and subaltern realities, yet these retained words were routinely accompanied by parenthetical inline explanations, footnotes, or comprehensive end-of-book glossaries[1]. In many late twentieth-century editions, retained *Bhasha* words were also visually set apart in italics, signalling a residual typographical anxiety—an editorial apology that marked the vernacular word as an alien guest trespassing upon the territory of standard Queen's English.

By the late 2000s and early 2020s, however, the cultural politics of English in India had shifted decisively. Following economic liberalization, the growth of a multilingual urban readership, and the expansion of trade publishing led by houses such as Penguin Books India[2][3] and independent global presses like Tilted Axis, twenty-first-century translators systematically dismantled the ethnographic apparatus of the previous generation. Translators such as Arunava Sinha[2] and Daisy Rockwell[3] largely abandoned both italicization and end-of-book

glossaries. Operating on the premise that English is now an indigenized subcontinental tongue—and that global readers should meet non-Western texts without colonial hand-holding—these translators integrate *Bhasha* vocabulary seamlessly in plain Roman font. In doing so, they transform lexical retention from a tentative ethnographic borrowing into an assertive poetics of foreignization, a concept theorized by Lawrence Venuti[8].

1.4. Research Objectives, Corpus Selection, and Structural Architecture

This article investigates how strategic untranslation operates across this thirty-year diachronic arc, arguing that the transition from paratextual transference to unglossed acoustic untranslation reflects a fundamental shift in translator agency and postcolonial target-language politics. To substantiate this thesis, the study examines three landmark *Bhasha*-to-English translations representing three distinct regional languages (Tamil, Bengali, and Hindi), literary genres, and chronological moments:

1. The Transitional Paratextual and Subaltern Phase (Turn of the Millennium): Lakshmi Holmström's English translation of Bama's Tamil Dalit auto-ethnography *Karukku* (originally published in Tamil in 1992; translated in 2000 for Macmillan India and reissued by Oxford University Press). ("Dalit", meaning "ground down" or "oppressed", is the self-chosen political designation of communities historically subjected to untouchability inside the Hindu caste hierarchy; [1]). *Karukku* demonstrates how strategic untranslation operates as subaltern resistance against both upper-caste Sanskritized Tamil and colonial English, while still utilizing an end-of-book Glossary to mediate its rural Tamil Catholic and Dalit lexicon[1].
2. The Unitalicized Urban Phase (Late 2000s): Arunava Sinha's English translation of Sankar's (Mani Sankar Mukherji's) 1962 Bengali classic *Chowringhee* (published by Penguin Books India in 2007, following an initial translation draft completed in 1992; [2]). Set in the grand Shahjahan Hotel in mid-twentieth-century Calcutta (now Kolkata; [2]), Sinha's translation drops all italics and glossaries, employing unglossed Bengali kinship suffixes, street foods, and colonial tavern macaronics to preserve urban intimacy and local colour[2].
3. The Radical Polyphonic and Acoustic Phase (Early 2020s): Daisy Rockwell's International Booker Prize-winning translation of Geetanjali Shree's 2018 Hindi novel *Ret Samadhi*, published as *Tomb of Sand*[3]. Rockwell elevates strategic untranslation into a structural and acoustic principle, retaining Hindi kinship roles as proper nouns and pairing untranslated Hindi words with inline English rhymes to preserve the oral storytelling (*kissa-goi*) and homophonic wordplay of the original[3].

Section 2 establishes the study's theoretical framework, placing Western translation taxonomies in dialogue with postcolonial and Indian translation theorists to construct a four-part analytical taxonomy of untranslated lexical items: (1) kinship and social hierarchy, (2) material and sensory culture, (3) affective-philosophical concepts, and (4) acoustic discourse markers. Section 3 applies this four-part taxonomy through detailed close readings of *Karukku*, *Chowringhee*, and *Tomb of Sand*. Finally, Section 4 synthesizes these findings in a comparative matrix, demonstrating how strategic untranslation reshapes the poetics of Indian literature in English translation.

2. Theoretical Framework: From Linguistic Deficit to the Poetics of Strategic Untranslation

To theorize the deliberate retention of source-language lexemes in contemporary *Bhasha*-to-English literary translation, scholarship must first disentangle the practice of *untranslation* from the philosophical and linguistic discourse of *untranslatability*. Within classical linguistic translation theory, the refusal or failure to translate a lexical item has traditionally been diagnosed through a model of structural deficit. John Cunnison Catford[4] famously categorized untranslatability into "linguistic" and "cultural" variants, arguing that cultural untranslatability arises when a situational feature functionally relevant for the source-language text is completely absent from the culture of which the target language is a part. In twenty-first-century comparative literature, this structuralist premise was expanded into a continental philosophical paradigm by Barbara Cassin[5] and Emily Apter[6]. While Cassin's[5] *Dictionary of Untranslatables* productively defines "untranslatables" not as words that are never translated, but as terms that one keeps on (not) translating due to their conceptual density, Apter[6] weaponizes the "Untranslatable" as a geopolitical check against the homogenizing, market-driven flattenings of global World Literature.

Yet, when applied to the micro-textual practices of postcolonial Indian translators, the rubric of *untranslatability* remains inadequate. Framing lexical retention through *untranslatability* implies that the translator is a passive hostage to linguistic boundaries—forced to retain a Tamil, Bengali, or Hindi word only because the English lexicon suffers from an insurmountable semantic void. As our close readings of Bama's *Karukku*[1], Sankar's *Chowringhee*[2], and Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand*[3] demonstrate, contemporary translators routinely leave *Bhasha* words untranslated even when exact, basic, one-to-one English dictionary equivalents exist—and indeed, even when those very English equivalents are printed alongside the retained *Bhasha* word in the same sentence[1][3]. Consequently, this study proposes *strategic untranslation* as an active, elective, and performative aesthetic strategy. Rather than signalling a failure of equivalence, untranslation represents a conscious prioritization of the phonetic body, relational ontology, and affective intimacy of the *Bhasha* signifier over the clinical transparency of standard Anglo-American English.

2.1. Re-evaluating Classical Western Taxonomies: Borrowing, Transference, Exoticism, and Foreignization

To map the mechanics of strategic untranslation, it is necessary to subject four foundational Western taxonomies of translation procedures to a postcolonial Indian critique:

1. Elective Borrowing for *Couleur Locale*: In their classic comparative stylistics, Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet[9] position *borrowing* (*emprunt*) as the simplest of all translation procedures, wherein a source-language word is transferred directly into the target text without morphological or semantic substitution. Crucially, Vinay and Darbelnet note that while borrowing often remedies a metalinguistic lacuna (such as a new technical process or an unknown cultural concept), translators also employ borrowing as a deliberate stylistic choice to introduce the flavour of the source culture's *couleur locale* (local colour). In the context of *Bhasha*-to-English translation, this distinction must be sharpened into a binary between *obligatory borrowing* (driven by lexical deficit) and *elective borrowing* (untranslation by design). When Arunava Sinha retains *alu-kabli* (spiced potato and chickpea snack) and *phuchka* (tamarind-water semolina puffs) in *Chowringhee*[2] or Daisy Rockwell retains *Bade*, *Bahu*, and *Beti* in *Tomb of Sand*[2], the borrowing is strictly elective: it rejects available English paraphrases or nouns in order to preserve the acoustic and sociological texture of the source world.
2. Lexical Transference and Typographical Politics: Peter Newmark[10] refines the technical operation of borrowing under the label of *transference*—the decision to transfer a source-language word (typically a culturally bound *cultureme*) unchanged into the target text. However, Newmark notes that transference often requires what he terms a *couplet*: pairing the transferred word with a functional or descriptive equivalent, a footnote, or an end-of-book glossary, while visually marking the word with italics. In late twentieth-century Indian translation practice—exemplified by Macmillan India's 2000 edition of *Karukku*[1]—Newmarkian transference was the dominant norm. While retaining Tamil words safeguarded Dalit cultural specificity, the paratextual glossary[1] functioned as an editorial mediation for outsiders[1]. The evolution toward twenty-first-century untranslation is marked precisely by the abandonment of Newmark's paratextual glossary in favour of unglossed typographical equality[2][3].
3. Exoticism Reclaimed as Cultural Intimacy: Sándor Hervey and Ian Higgins[11] situate translation choices along a spectrum of cultural transposition running from *cultural transplantation* (complete domestication) to *exoticism*, wherein linguistic and cultural features of the source text are imported wholesale with minimal adaptation, constantly reminding the target reader of the text's foreign origin. From a South Asian postcolonial perspective, however, the label "exoticism" betrays a Eurocentric bias: it assumes that the target reader of an English translation is always a Westerner for whom Indian realities are "exotic". When *Bhasha* texts are translated into English within India for a predominantly Indian or South Asian readership, retaining words like *boudi*, *dada*, *sindoor*, or *puja*[2][3] does not make the text look "exotic". On the contrary, it prevents the text from sounding alienated and artificial. Untranslation thus inverts Hervey and Higgins's scale, transforming *exoticism* into *cultural intimacy*.
4. Acoustic and Performative Foreignization: Lawrence Venuti's[8] foundational dichotomy between *domestication* (an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values, prized as "fluency" and translator "invisibility") and *foreignization* (an ethnodeviant pressure on target-language values to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text) provides the overarching ideological

frame for our study. In contemporary *Bhasha* translations, untranslation operationalizes Venuti's foreignization at the phonological and acoustic level—forcing the rhythm, pitch, and syntax of the English sentence to bend around indigenous speech patterns[1][2][3].

2.2. Postcolonial Agency, Rhetoric, and Structural Fidelity: Ashcroft, Spivak, and Ramanujan

While Western translation models classify lexical retention as a technical procedure, postcolonial and Indian translation theorists reveal its deeper political and ontological stakes. In *The Empire Writes Back*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin[12] demonstrate how postcolonial texts subvert the imperial hegemony of standard English through twin strategies of *abrogation* (refusing the normative categories of the imperial culture) and *appropriation* (remoulding the English language to bear the burden of indigenous experience). Central to appropriation is the insertion of unglossed vernacular words into the English text, a device Ashcroft et al.[12] term the *metonymic gap*. When a writer or translator leaves a native word unglossed, that word does not merely name a local object; it stands in synecdochically as a metonym for the entire source culture, creating a gap between the colonized subject's world and the metropolitan reader's comprehension that resists colonial assimilation.

This postcolonial resistance is theorized specifically for feminist and subaltern translation by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak[13][14]. In her seminal essay 'The Politics of Translation'[15] (collected in *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, 1993—a text explicitly cited by Lakshmi Holmström in her Translator's Introduction to *Karukku*), Spivak critiques the phenomenon of well-meaning metropolitan "translatese", wherein literature from the Global South is translated into a flat, uniform Anglo-American register so that "all the literature of the Third World gets translated into a sort of with-it translatese, so that the literature by a woman in Palestine begins to resemble, in the feel of its prose, something by a man in Taiwan" [13]. To counter this homogenizing erasure, Spivak divides language into a triad of *logic*, *rhetoric*, and *silence*. While pedestrian translation transfers only the logical-semantic surface of a sentence, ethical translation must attend to *rhetoricity*—where logic frays and cultural specificity resides. For Spivak, achieving this rhetorical fidelity requires the translator to become an intimate reader who practices a "surrender to the special call of the text".[13][15]. In *Bhasha*-to-English translation, strategic untranslation is the primary instrument of Spivakian rhetorical surrender: by refusing to smooth subaltern Tamil caste markers[1] (*Cheri*, *Paraya jati*, *kuuzh*) or North Indian gendered kinship structures[3] (*Bahu*, *Beti*, *hijra*) into sanitized English equivalents, the translator preserves the jagged rhetorical friction of the original text.

Complementing Spivak's political-rhetorical ethics is the structural and poetic translation theory of Attipat Krishnaswami Ramanujan[16][17][18]. In his landmark translations of classical Tamil Sangam poetry (*Poems of Love and War*, 1985) and Kannada Virasaiva *vacanas* (*Speaking of Siva*, 1973), Ramanujan grappled with how to carry an indigenous Indian poetic universe across into English without turning it into either a dry philological crib or a domesticated Western lyric. Ramanujan[17][18] distinguishes between a text's "outer form" (its metre, acoustic patterning, and lexical surface) and its "inner form" (its underlying structural metaphors, ecological taxonomy, and relational worldview). As Ramanujan demonstrates, in Indian literary traditions, nature, landscape, and social hierarchy are not mere decorative backdrops; they constitute a systematic interior grammar. When a translator encounters culturally dense signifiers—such as the serrated palmyra *karukku* in Bama's Tamil[15][1], the colonial clerk-gentleman *babu* in Sankar's Bengali[2], or the yogic trance-tomb *samādhi* and classical *raga* notes (*sa re ga ma*) in Shree's Hindi[3]—translating them into generic English botanical or sociological terms destroys the "inner form" of the work. Strategic untranslation honours Ramanujan's structural fidelity by retaining the exact lexical vessels that hold the text's inner and outer forms together.

2.3. Indian English Hybridity and World Literature: Trivedi, Kothari, Prasad, and Walkowitz

The transition from late twentieth-century paratextual hesitation to twenty-first-century unitalicized untranslation is also deeply rooted in the changing sociolinguistic ecology of English in India. As Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi[19] argue, translation in India operates within an ancient, non-monolingual cultural matrix where multiple *Bhashas* have coexisted for millennia. In *Translating India: The Cultural Politics of English*, Rita Kothari[7] traces how the rise of a post-liberalization, urban pan-Indian readership in the late 1990s and 2000s transformed the market for *Bhasha* literature in English translation. Because the primary readership of Indian translations published by houses like Penguin

Books India[2][3] or Oxford University Press[1] is domestic and multilingual, translators no longer need to over-explain pan-Indian cultural realities (such as *puja*, *aarti*, *bindi*, *paratha*, or *ghat*; [2][3]) as if addressing a Victorian colonial administrator.

Gobinda Sarma J. V. Prasad[20] theorizes this linguistic confidence by arguing that Indian English writing and translation are fundamentally acts of "polluting the sacred tongue". Rather than aspiring to the monocultural purity of standard Queen's English, Indian translators deliberately infuse English with the rhythms, kinship suffixes, and acoustic interjections of Indian languages, creating a hybrid target language that reflects subcontinental bilingualism.

On a global scale, this assertive hybridity aligns with Rebecca L. Walkowitz's[21] theorization of contemporary world literature in *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature*. Walkowitz[21] observes that twenty-first-century novels increasingly build translation—and strategic non-translation—into their very form, challenging the romantic assumption that a literary work belongs to a single, homogeneous national language or addresses a monolingual native reader. By refusing to italicize foreign words or provide ethnographic glossaries, contemporary translations disrupt the illusion of native fluency and compel readers to inhabit a multilingual space. When Arunava Sinha drops all italics and glossaries in *Chowringhee*[2] and Daisy Rockwell weaves Hindi rhymes (*Gaya bhi gaya... voh bhi gaya*) directly into the English cadence of *Tomb of Sand*[3], they exemplify Walkowitz's paradigm: the translation refuses to erase its *Bhasha* origins, revelling instead in its status as a polyphonic palimpsest.

2.4. The Four-Part Analytical Taxonomy of Strategic Untranslation

Synthesizing these Western, postcolonial, and Indian theoretical frameworks, this study proposes a four-part analytical taxonomy—summarized in Table 1—to classify and analyze untranslated lexical items across our thirty-year primary corpus.

Taxonomy Category	Theoretical Grounding	Core Analytical Focus in Bhasha-to-English Texts
1. Kinship and Social Hierarchy	Ashcroft et al.[12]; Hervey and Higgins[11] inverted as *cultural intimacy*; Spivak[13].	Retaining familial designations (*Ma, Bade, Bahu, Beti, Paatti, Annan*), fictive kinship suffixes (*Bose-da, Mem-boudi, Saheb-dada*), caste markers (*Cheri, Paraya jati, Naicker*), and feudal/bureaucratic ranks (*pannaiyaal, babu, Zill-e-Subhani*) to preserve relational ontology and power hierarchies.
2. Material and Sensory Culture	Ramanujan[17][18]; Vinay and Darbelnet[9] *elective borrowing*; Kothari[7].	Retaining ecological metaphors (*karukku/karu*), sub-regional foodways (*kuuzh, alu-kabli, phuchka, baati chokha, bharbhara*), sartorial semiotics (*daavani, dhoti, lungi, tikli, sindoor*), and folk arts (*kuuthu, kummi, villuppaattu*) to anchor the text in indigenous sensory geography.
3. Affective-Philosophical Concepts	Ramanujan[16][18] *inner form*; Newmark[10]; Cassin[5].	Retaining metaphysical, liturgical, and ritual concepts (*samādhi, Kalpataru, ashtbhuj mudra, Pusai, bhakti, bhayam, paasam, darshan, Firinghee Kali*)—often in direct apposition with English words—to prevent indigenous cosmology from being flattened into Western secular or Christian terms.
4. Acoustic Discourse Markers and Sonic Wordplay	Venuti[8] *foreignization*; Prasad[20] *polluting the sacred tongue*; Walkowitz[21].	Retaining conversational interjections (*Chi, Ayyo Amma, Ram Ram!, Arre, Chee chee / un-chee chee*), gendered vocatives (*da, di*), classical musicology (*sa re ga ma, taar saptak, panchtaal*), colonial pidgin (*Jaldi, jaldi mangta*), and homophonic puns (*Gaya bhi gaya*) to preserve oral cadence and phonetic charm.

Table 1. Four-Part Analytical Taxonomy of Strategic Untranslation in *Bhasha*-to-English Texts

3. Textual Analysis: Close Readings Across the Three-Decade Arc

3.1. Subaltern Resistance and the Metonymic Gap: Bama's Karukku[1].

Published at the turn of the millennium, Lakshmi Holmström's translation of Bama's 1992 Tamil Dalit autobiography *Karukku*[1] represents a foundational moment in Dalit translation. As Holmström[15] observes in her Translator's Introduction, Bama subverts the decorum of upper-caste literary Tamil by employing a demotic, oral Dalit register that breaks received grammatical rules. To prevent this subaltern voice from being erased by Anglo-American domestication, Holmström retains Tamil lexemes across all four categories of our taxonomy, while relying on an end-of-book Glossary to mediate for non-Tamil readers[1].

3.1.1. Kinship and Social Hierarchy

In *Karukku*, untranslated kinship and caste terms expose the spatial and bodily violence of untouchability[1]. In Chapter 2, the narrator recounts how her grandmothers (*Paatti*) worked as servants for dominant-caste *Naicker* households, while her university-educated elder brother (*Annan*) resisted upper-caste interrogation:

And this grandmother, like all the other labourers, would call the little boy Ayya, Master, and run about to do his bidding. It was shameful to see them do this. Even the way they were given their drinking water was disquieting to watch. The Naicker women would pour out the water from a height of four feet, while Paatti and the others received and drank it with cupped hands held to their mouths[1].

He thought my Annan looked unfamiliar, and so he asked, 'Who are you, appa, what's your name?' Annan told him his name. Immediately the other man asked, 'Thambi, on which street do you live?' The point of this was that if he knew on which street we lived, he would know our caste too. Annan's reply was sharp, like a slap in the face, 'I am a Paraya from the Cheri street'[1].

Annan told me all these things. And he added, 'Because we are born into the Paraya jati, we are never given any honour or dignity or respect. We are stripped of all that. But if we study and make progress, we can throw away these indignities.' [...] As Annan had urged, I stood first in my class. And because of that, many people became my friends, even though I am a Paraichi (ibid.).

While Holmström pairs *Ayya* with its inline English gloss ("Master"), she retains *Paatti* (grandmother), *Annan* (elder brother), *appa* (a familiar vocative, literally "father"), *Thambi* (younger brother), *Cheri* (the segregated Dalit quarter), *Paraya jati* (the Paraya caste community), and the feminine caste noun *Paraichi*. Translating *Paatti* as "Grandmother" would strip the water-pouring scene of its vernacular familial ache, while translating *Cheri* as "slum" or "ghetto" would import Western urban socio-economics, obscuring the ritualized purity-pollution binary dividing the upper-caste streets from the Dalit settlement[1].

Similarly, Holmström retains the vocabulary of agrarian bondage and village authority, pairing *pannaiyaal* with "bonded labourers" and *naataamai* with "headman", alongside *Kotthaal* (labour supervisor) and *saami* (lord or master):

More than three quarters of the land in these parts is in the hands of the Naickers. People of our community work for them, each Paraya family attached to a Naicker family, as pannaiyaal, bonded labourers. [...] Everybody said that my Paatti was a true and proper servant. She worked as a labourer to a Naicker family, but she was also a Kotthaal—she hired labourers for them, brought them to work regularly, supervised them, and made sure they received their wages[1].

The naataamai, having dashed into the room where the storage jar was kept, had shut its half doors, bolted them from the inside, and retreated well within the jar. [...] His mother, who was outside, pleaded and wept saying, 'Ayya, he is the headman of this place. Leave him alone, saami'[1].

Within the Dalit streets, by contrast, untranslated kinship nouns—such as *Akka* (elder sister), *machaan* (brother-in-law or cross-cousin), *Periamma* (mother's elder sister), and *Chittappa* (father's younger brother)[1]—preserve the warm fictive kinship that sustains communal solidarity.

3.1.2. Material and Sensory Culture

The governing symbol of the entire text is its untranslated title, *Karukku*. In her Author's Preface, Bama writes:

There are many congruities between the saw-edged palmyra karukku and my own life. Not only did I pick up the scattered palmyra karukku in the days when I was sent out to gather firewood, scratching and tearing my skin as I played with them; but later they also became the embryo and symbol that grew into this book[1].

In her Introduction, Holmström explains why semantic equivalence fails here:

Karukku means palmyra leaves, which, with their serrated edges on both sides, are like double-edged swords. By a felicitous pun, the Tamil word karukku, containing the word karu, embryo or seed, also means freshness, newness[15].

Had Holmström domesticated the title into *Palmyra Leaves*, the translation would have lost both the harsh velar plosives (/*k*/) that acoustically mimic skin laceration and the morphological pun connecting the saw-toothed stalk (*karukku*) to embryonic revolutionary consciousness (*karu*).

This material specificity extends to caste-stratified foodways, grain measurements, clothing, and folk arts:

People sold all sorts of fish like silabi kendai, paaruku kendai, keluti, ayirai, koravi, viraal. But in our own street, we mostly bought and cooked curries out of silebi kendai and paambu kendai. Because that was the cheapest we could get. The upper castes bought and ate ayirai, keluti and viraal. But we couldn't afford to pay that much for what we ate[1].

At mid-day break, we would drink our kuuzh along with a mouthful of fresh nuts. We would separate and clean the pods until sunset time, and then carry them to the Naicker's granaries. There, the Naicker's pannaiyaal would measure the cleaned groundnuts by the marakkaal, and pay us five or ten paise for each marakkaal[1].

Usually we had rice and kuzhambu only in the evenings. Otherwise, it was some kind of kuuzh in the mornings and at mid-day. [...] The shop owners would usually prepare this 'kadichukira' in their own homes and bring it to their shops. [...] We'd go to the lake-side in the evenings, pluck some wild greens like kuppaikira or thoyilukkira, and eat it with a quickly stirred and thickened ragi dough[1].

By retaining *kuuzh* (fermented millet porridge; [1]) alongside *kuzhambu* (tamarind-based broth), *kadichukira* (spiced brinjal and chilli relish), *marakkaal* (a wooden grain-measuring vessel), and wild greens (*kuppaikira*, *thoyilukkira*), Holmström avoids assimilating Dalit agrarian sustenance into Victorian workhouse tropes such as "gruel". Likewise, retaining garments such as *daavani* (half-sari), *chappals* (sandals), and *veshtis* (men's waist-cloths; [1]) alongside folk performance traditions—*kuuthu* (folk street theatre), *kummi* (women's rhythmic clapping dance), *pallaanguzhi* and *thattaangal* (indoor board and pebble games), *silambam* (martial staff fencing), *jalli-kattu* (bull-chasing sport), *pullanguzhal* (bamboo flute), *sapparam* (wooden festival chariot), and *villuppaattu* (bow-song storytelling)[1].—anchors the narrative in subaltern sensory culture.

3.1.3. Affective-Philosophical and Religious Concepts

As Holmström[15] notes in her Introduction, *Karukku* documents Tamil Dalit Catholicism through a layered vocabulary where Sanskritic and Tamil terms acquire Catholic meanings—such as *mantiram* (magic charm or sacred utterance) signifying "catechism". Throughout Chapter 7, Holmström retains *Pusai* (the Tamilized form of *puja*) and *Guga Pusai* (grotto Mass) rather than "Mass", noting that "the bhakti [devotion] and belief I had in God has changed in a curious way" and that as children "we had to rise at dawn and go to morning Pusai"[1]. Even more strikingly, Holmström pairs English and Tamil affective and supernatural nouns in direct proximity:

When I finished schooling in my village and joined the convent boarding school to study in the ninth class, the fear bhayam, that I felt towards God gradually left me, and love paasam, grew. I tried to the best of my ability to pray at all times; to go to Jesus, look at him, and talk to him frequently; not to behave in a way that would cause him pain; not to commit sinful deeds; to be good[1].

In the clause "the fear bhayam, that I felt towards God gradually left me, and love paasam, grew"[1], the exact English equivalents ("fear" and "love") are already printed on the page. Retaining *bhayam* and *paasam* alongside *bhakti*, *Pusai*, and indigenous supernatural spirits—such as

when children pluck sacred neem and tamarind leaves so that "no pey, pisaasu nor ill-wind would come near"[1]—is therefore an intentional stylistic choice to preserve the syncretic cosmology and emotional interiority of Tamil Dalit life.

3.1.4. Acoustic Discourse Markers and Orality

To capture the spoken pungency of Dalit speech[15][1], Holmström retains Tamil exclamations of disgust (*Chi*, *Che*), cries of physical agony (*Ayyo Amma*), subaltern phonetic elongations (*saar*), and intimate gendered vocative particles (*da* for male equals or juniors; *di* for female equals or juniors). During the inter-caste conflict in Chapter 3, Maama Paralokam exclaims, "Chi, it's a disgrace, it stinks. Never in history has it been known for a Paraya to die at the hands of a Chaaliyar"[1], and during the ensuing police raid on the Dalit street, the narrator recalls:

Outside, we heard the thud of police boots stamping up and down, the sharp sounds of blows as our men were struck repeatedly, and the yells, 'Ayyo Amma,' of unendurable pain. As the women saw their husbands, their children, their fathers and their brothers being beaten, they cried out in pity. [...] Paatti asked me, 'Why, whatever happened, di? Did the fighting break out again?'[1].

Whether preserving childhood consonant-substitution nicknames like *teppa tuuzhu* for *keppa kuuzhu* (ragi millet porridge; [1]), the women's funeral dirge *oppaari*[1], toddlers drumming and singing out "sanjanakka-sanjanakka"[1], or the rhyming Tamil liberation slogan in the Afterword—"proclaiming aloud, 'Dalit endru sollada; talai nimirndu nillada: Say you are a Dalit; lift up your head and stand tall'"[1].—Holmström's strategic untranslation ensures that the oral cadence of Dalit resistance rings through the English text.

3.2. Dropping Typographical Apologies and Preserving Urban Intimacy: Sankar's Chowringhee[2].

If *Karukku*[1] represents a transitional phase where retained *Bhasha* lexemes are supported by an ethnographic glossary[1], Arunava Sinha's 2007 translation of Sankar's 1962 Bengali bestseller *Chowringhee*[2] marks a decisive break toward typographical equality. Sinha eliminates both italics and glossaries, integrating Bengali and Hindustani words seamlessly into English sentences to capture the *couleur locale* and social intimacy of mid-twentieth-century Calcutta[2].

3.2.1. Kinship and Social Hierarchy

In the opening chapter of *Chowringhee*, the unemployed narrator Shankar recalls his former life at the Calcutta High Court, where he worked as a *babu* (inline-glossed once on page 1 as "the lawyer's clerk") for a British barrister and enjoyed the mentorship of senior clerks whom he addresses with the Bengali elder-brother suffix *-da*: *Chhoka-da*, *Arjun-da*, and *Haru-da*[2]. When the barrister dies, *Chhoka-da* comforts Shankar over tea by remarking that any barrister would want a *babu* like him, though all the barristers already have *babus* of their own[2], and Shankar later despairs over whether starvation is what fate ordained for the last *babu* of the last English barrister at the High Court[2]. Although "clerk" is available in English (and used by Sinha when referring to "fellow clerks"; [2]), Sinha retains *babu* and *babus* unitalicized because in colonial and post-independence Calcutta, *babu* carries an irreplaceable sociological duality: it signifies both white-collar Bengali middle-class (*bhadralok*) respectability and subaltern dependence on British patronage[2].

Even more revealing is how Sinha uses untranslated Bengali kinship suffixes (*-da* for elder brother; *-di* for elder sister) and hybrid compounds (*Mem-boudi*, *Saheb-dada*) to humanize the alienated corporate space of the Shahjahan Hotel and the streets of Calcutta. In Chapter 3, when receptionist Satyasundar Bose instructs Shankar in the low-pitched "hotel voice" and addresses him formally as "Mr Mukherjee", Shankar insists on replacing corporate English formality with Bengali fictive kinship, declaring that he will call him *Bose-da*, to which Bose replies that he would also like Shankar to use his neighbourhood pet name *Sata-da*[2]. A few pages later, admiring the naturally dark eyes of colleague William Ghosh, Shankar compares them to *Putu-di* from his childhood[2].

This kinship grammar reaches its emotional climax in Chapter 4 during old Mr Hobbs's narrative of the nineteenth-century English barmaid Jane Grey and her husband Robert (Robbie) Adam[2]. Ostracized by the British *boxwallahs* (colonial mercantile executives) of Clive Street for marrying a barmaid and dying of smallpox in a ramshackle flat on Williams Lane[2], the impoverished English couple is adopted by the local Hindu neighbourhood boys, who address Jane as *Mem-boudi* and Robbie as *Saheb-dada*[2]. The Bengali youths take over *Mem-boudi's* market

shopping, keep night vigil outside the hospital ward because *Saheb-dada* is ill, and ultimately borrow money to place funeral wreaths on their hearses (ibid.).

Here, Hervey and Higgins's[11] concept of *exoticism* is completely inverted. By fusing colonial racial markers (*Mem*, white European woman; *Saheb*, European gentleman) with intimate Bengali familial titles (*boudi*, elder brother's wife; *dada*, elder brother), the untranslated compounds *Mem-boudi* and *Saheb-dada* transform foreign outcasts into beloved family members[2]. Alongside subcontinental titles of rank and servitude—such as *nawab-bahadurs*, *raja-bahadur*, *Rai Bahadur*, *sahib*, and nineteenth-century tavern *khidmatgars* (waiters or table servants; [2])—Sinha's untranslation preserves the exact social stratigraphy of Kolkata.

3.2.2. Material and Sensory Culture

Rather than paraphrasing Bengali street food, sweets, and domestic clothing for non-Bengali readers, Sinha deploys elective borrowing[9] to contrast the indigenous sensory pleasures of Calcutta's streets with the continental menus of the Shahjahan Hotel[2]. In Chapter 1, walking through the melting May asphalt of Dalhousie Square, Shankar laments having earned nothing while recklessly spending three *annas* (pre-decimal currency units equal to one-sixteenth of a rupee): one *anna* on tram fare, a second on a plate of *alu-kabli*, and a third—out of sheer temptation—on *phuchka*[2]. Similarly, in Chapter 5, when Shankar admits that back in his home neighbourhood of Kashundia he never understood the French abbreviation RSVP on banquet cards, *Bose-da* jokes that in their school days they decoded RSVP as *rashogolla-sandesh-very-pleasing*, which guaranteed that a major feast was in store[2].

Had Sinha translated *alu-kabli* as "spiced boiled potato and chickpea chat" and *phuchka* as "crisp tamarind-water semolina puffs", the rhythmic pathos of Shankar's three-anna extravagance would have been ruined by culinary explanation[2]. Likewise, *Bose-da's* schoolboy backronym (*rashogolla-sandesh-very-pleasing*; [2]) relies on the untranslated names of Bengal's signature milk confections (*rashogolla* and *sandesh*) to mock elite banquet pretentiousness. Similarly, when Shankar retreats from the Westernized hotel lobby into his tiny terrace room (number 362), Sinha marks his return to his private Bengali self through untranslated domestic garments: taking off his shirt and trousers to put on a *dhoti* (men's unstitched waist-cloth) in Bengali style[2] or rushing back inside when caught on the terrace wearing nothing but a *lungi* (casual sarong; [2]).

3.2.3. Affective-Philosophical and Religious Concepts

In *Chowringhee*, Sinha retains Hindu and syncretic religious concepts to generate both ironic workplace satire and subaltern pathos. In Chapter 2, after an American guest praises India's naked *fakirs* (ascetics) who can sleep for centuries[2], Bose sends Shankar to meet the fearsome hotel manager Marco Polo by invoking the Hindu devotional act of beholding a deity, telling him to go downstairs and have a *darshan* of Marco Polo's beautiful face[2].

In Chapter 4, *Bose-da* playfully conflates the German composer Brahms with the Hindu creator deity *Brahma* and the reformist *Brahmo Samaj*[2], and teases Shankar for comparing Dr Sutherland's eyes to Lord Krishna by using the vernacular epithet *Kishenchand* alongside his consort *Radhika*[2]. Most poignantly, when the Englishman Robbie Adam is dying of smallpox, Jane recounts how the local Hindu boys mobilized indigenous devotion at the historic Bowbazar shrine of *Firinghee Kali* (the "Foreigners' Kali"), raising money themselves to pray to *Firinghee Kali* and forbidding fish in the house so the goddess would remain pleased[2]. Retaining *darshan*, *Firinghee Kali*, *Brahma*, and *Kishenchand* preserves the tension between Calcutta's sacred geography and its commercial hotel culture.

3.2.4. Acoustic Discourse Markers and Multilingual Wordplay

Finally, Sinha enacts Venuti's[8] foreignization and Prasad's[20] "polluting the sacred tongue" by retaining moral interjections, colonial pidgin commands, and vernacular Bengali phonetic adaptations. When the upright Clive Building doorman refuses Shankar's offer of a kickback in Chapter 1, he pales in moral outrage and thunders *Ram Ram!*[2]—an invocation of Lord Ram that carries a moral weight no English interjection ("Good heavens!") could replicate. In the hotel kitchen and bar, Sinha leaves colonial Hindustani commands and macaronic tavern songs completely unglossed: the Italian steward Jimmy barks out the breakfast menu and finishes with the pidgin command *Jaldi, jaldi mangta* ("want

it quickly, quickly"; [2]), while a drunken Marco Polo belts out Davy Carson's nineteenth-century Calcutta song mixing English verse with Hindustani orders to the servant—catching the *hukum* (command) of *Jaldi jao* ("go quickly") and *Hey Khitmatgar, brandy sharab, bilati pani lao* ("O barman, bring brandy liquor and foreign soda water"; [2]). Alongside vernacular Bengali phonetic adaptations—such as Shankar calling an omelette a *mamlette* in his student days at Keshto Café[2] and the bearer Gurberia pronouncing Marco Polo as *Markapala sahib*[2]—Sinha's unitalicized untranslation preserves the polyphonic acoustic history of Kolkata.

3.3. Radical Acoustic Untranslation and Polyphonic Play: Geetanjali Shree's Tomb of Sand[3]

The historical trajectory from paratextual transference to confident strategic untranslation reaches its theoretical apex in Daisy Rockwell's translation of Geetanjali Shree's Hindi novel *Ret Samadhi*, published in English as *Tomb of Sand*[3]. Rockwell elevates untranslation into a radical structural and acoustic principle across all four domains of our taxonomy, retaining Hindi and Urdu words even where exact, basic English equivalents exist[3].

3.3.1. Kinship and Social Hierarchy

Throughout the novel, Rockwell refuses to translate the kinship designations of the central North Indian family, retaining *Ma* (Mother), *Bade* (Eldest Son), *Beti* (Daughter), and *Bahu* (Daughter-in-Law) as capitalized, unitalicized proper nouns[3]. Early in Part One, the narrator explicitly foregrounds this naming strategy when introducing the family members: "This particular eldest son—let's call him Bade—had long been employed at the sort of government job that involves many transfers"[3], and two chapters later adds, "Something must be said about the daughter. We'll call her Beti. After all, she's one of the two main women in this tale, and will make her presence felt throughout"[3]. When introducing Bade's wife in Chapter 11, the text explicitly catalogues the available English equivalents before discarding them:

Well, you are the limit. Mem Sahib, a.k.a. his wife, a.k.a. the sister-in-law, a.k.a. the daughter-in-law, so we'll call her Bahu, confronted him angrily. Bhaiya is coming this evening. You were saying last night, there's just a little left, serve it to him for dinner. Now it's turned to poison? And she flared up in English: Stop undermining me in front of the servants[3].

This passage provides definitive empirical proof that untranslation is an aesthetic choice, not a symptom of untranslatability. As summarized in Table 2, every single one of these Hindi kinship titles has an exact English dictionary equivalent, yet translating them would flatten both the relational ontology and the alliterative music of Shree's prose.

Retained Hindi Designation	Exact English Equivalent	Consequence of Semantic Translation	Aesthetic Achievement of Untranslation
Ma / Amma	Mother / Mum	Shifts register toward clinical distance ("Mother") or British domesticity ("Mum").	Preserves the primal, open-vowel acoustic anchor of the North Indian household[3].
Bade	Eldest (Son)	Turning "Eldest" into a proper noun ("Eldest walked in") reads like a stiff European fable.	Captures the quiet patriarchal authority and subtle irony embedded in the Hindi honorific *bade* ("big/senior"; [3]).
Bahu	Daughter-in-Law	Clunky, hyphenated three-word compound that ruins sentence rhythm and sounds legalistic.	Carries the sociological weight of domestic duty, veiled deference, and marital absorption[3].
Beti	Daughter	Flattens the contrast between the restricted *Bahu* and the modern, independent *Beti*.	Maintains the alliterative labial triad (*Bade–Bahu–Beti*) that scores the domestic friction of the novel[3].

Table 2. Strategic Untranslation of Primary Kinship Designations in *Tomb of Sand*[3]

Had Rockwell used "Daughter" or "Mother" as proper nouns in scenes of tender interiority—such as "Poor, bewildered Ma, thought Beti, becoming the mother now"[3]—the English prose would have sounded cold and allegorical.

Rockwell similarly retains subaltern, gender-nonconforming, and bureaucratic titles:

Rosie was a hijra, she'd visited Ma for years, calling her sister: Behin ji, Behin ji, asking for baksheesh on Holi, eidi on Eid; she came for the children's birthdays and celebrations, sometimes she took something, sometimes she brought something, and everyone had seen her outside with Ma, on the lawn, seated on a low stool, chatting and snacking on dal moth with tea[3].

Listen, Baby, said Rosie, looking at Beti. Your Amma is sixteen all over again. Even the air injures her fine skin. Did you hear, Baby? Of course she heard. That Ma ji had turned into Baji. Where was I? Where am I? The language changes from one thing to another and I don't have ears to hear it? How can Ma ji become Baji? Should I start calling her Chamma, instead of Amma?[3].

Translating *Ma ji* (respected mother) and *Baji* (Urdu for elder sister) into English would destroy the morpho-phonemic rhyme (*Ma ji* $\rightarrow$ *Baji* $\rightarrow$ *Amma* $\rightarrow$ *Chamma*) on which Beti's jealousy hinges[3]. Likewise, in describing Bade's civil service retinue, Rockwell retains *Chaprasi* (peon), *typist babu*, *Sahib ji*, *durbar* (royal court), and the Persianate imperial title *Zill-e-Subhani*:

Everyone longs for government employment. Chaprasi, constable, typist babu, driver, gardener, anything, so long as it's in a government office. [...] Bade, due to being a government official even after losing village, Ganga, roses, opium, attar, was everyone's Zill-e-Subhani, their Shadow of God, their Great Provider. A crowd would queue up in his durbar, their requests and paper slips writ large on their faces: Please set this one up somewhere, get this one enrolled at such and such, have this one's illness looked into, this one's promotion is stalled, get it moving again, and this one had a false report entered at his police station, please, save him. If you just put in a word, Sahib ji, to the chief engineers[3].

Even when providing an inline gloss ("everyone's Zill-e-Subhani, their Shadow of God"; [3]), Rockwell retains the Persianate-Urdu title to satirize post-independence bureaucratic feudalism.

3.3.2. Material and Sensory Culture

In depicting North Indian material culture, Rockwell deploys unglossed borrowing[9] to preserve visual bridal semiotics and sub-regional culinary geography. Contrast Bahu's marital adornments with Beti's unmarked feminist brow:

When she went on her honeymoon she wore the kind of sparkly tikli bindis you find at fairs and such on the banks of the Ganga, and her braid swung with parandas of red and gold. She discarded the bindi for a defiant kumkum, a full moon rising in the middle of her forehead, which expanded as the years passed, eventually changing hues to match her sari or suit[3].

The daughter assesses her wrists and fingers, she touches her forehead to make sure it's free, happy, no one has coloured it, there's no tikli, no bindi? Rather, sister-in-law has just brushed past, sindoor erupting like red lava from the volcano that is her brow[3].

At Bade's retirement luncheon, Rockwell retains an exuberant catalogue of Indian street foods, sweets, and regional dishes without a single italic or footnote:

And the jalebis, imaratis, balushahis sizzle and dance in the karahi. [...] Bade was from the east, his wife from the west. If he asked for bharbhara, makuni, tikkar, guramma, she would make jhordoi, phajita, matha ghuinya, and on one occasion it came to such a head when the wife modernised the recipes of her in-laws' home and came up with a sattu barley flour milkshake. Sacrilege! Unthinkable![3].

Here, the cultural clash between Bade's eastern Uttar Pradesh roots (*bharbhara, makuni, tikkar, guramma, sattu, baati chokha*) and Bahu's western Uttar Pradesh palate (*jhordoi, phajita, matha ghuinya*) is carried entirely by untranslated regional culinary lexemes[3]. Whether cataloguing *paan* (betel leaf) stall ingredients (*Benarsi*, *Magahi*, *Gulkand*, *supari*, *kimam*; [3]), Ayurvedic hair herbs ("amla, bhringaraj, brahmi, and a spoonful of henna"; [3]), or indigenous mango varieties culminating in the bilingual racial pun on *safeda* ("and that most pale and white of all the mangoes, the safeda... Like me. Ha ha ha"; [3]), Rockwell's untranslation preserves sub-regional sensory texture.

3.3.3. Affective-Philosophical Concepts

Rockwell's handling of metaphysical and ritual vocabulary demonstrates how untranslation restores philosophical polysemy that English equivalence flattens. While the novel's title translates *Ret Samadhi* as *Tomb of Sand*, Rockwell places an unitalicized dictionary definition of *samādhi* as the book's opening epigraph (defining it as a deep yogic trance, ascetic self-entombment, and a saint's tomb; [3]) and reintroduces the untranslated word in Chapter 29:

Nonetheless it's rare for the existence of such a tomb, which is not really a tomb, but a deep meditative trance called a samadhi, to be erased. [...] Meaning, even if centuries erode them or beasts and birds nibble away at them—even if villainy is heaped upon villainy—these tales, these tombs, these samadhis, these idols, they just won't die, nor will they remain buried forever[3].

Furthermore, Rockwell repeatedly places English translations and untranslated Sanskritic or Hindi concepts in direct apposition:

Granny had—as of when?—picked up the new cane, and lay flat on her back, holding it in the air at a ninety degree angle, eyes closed, still as a statue, looking every inch an otherworldly idol. Cane, straight in the air. But before Sid could laugh, make a joke, a voice emanated from her direction: I am the Wishing Tree. I am the Kalpataru[3].

But just as you don't need to be a music critic to name that tune, or read the Natya Shastra to be an art expert, so too, even without getting a bhumi poojan, or handing money to a vastu-shastra-feng-shui expert, you can create perfect harmony between air, light, food and water[3].

In appositional pairings such as "I am the Wishing Tree. I am the Kalpataru"[3], "Ma's eight-armed pose, her ashtbhuj mudra, was a sight worth seeing"[3], and "so they could initiate ghar wa-pasi—Mission Return Home?"[3], the English semantic equivalent is already provided in the sentence. Retaining *Kalpataru*, *ashtbhuj mudra*, and *ghar wa-pasi* alongside *puja*, *aarti*, and *dharamshala* (pilgrims' rest house; [3]) is therefore a pure aesthetic strategy to evoke mythological and socio-political resonance.

3.3.4. Acoustic Discourse Markers and Sonic Wordplay

Rockwell's most subversive achievement is her practice of radical acoustic foreignization[8], retaining Hindi conversational interjections, classical musicological terms, and homophonic puns so that the English text resounds with North Indian vocal pitch and rhythm. Throughout the dialogue, characters exclaim "Arre, how foolishly I slipped" and "Arre, son, I was bleeding"[3], "Aji, once we've become a great civilization"[3], and "Ai hai, you're acting like a touch-me-not, Baji"[3]. When Ma and Beti watch Western films together, Rockwell writes: "Mother and daughter watch films together. They laugh awkwardly at the Western kissing. Chee chee, Ma says in a completely un-chee chee tone—how can they mix their spit like that?"[3]. Here, Rockwell morphology-blends an English prefix (*un-*) with an untranslated Hindi exclamation of disgust (*chee chee*), exemplifying Prasad's[20] "polluting the sacred tongue".

This acoustic fidelity extends to Indian classical musicology (*sa*, *taar saptak* or upper octave, and *sur* or tone; [3]) and the percussive orchestration of Beti's apartment:

At the tap of her fingers, instruments are summoned and notes emerge: sa re ga ma. At the thwap of her foot, the panchtaal plays. A jaltarang from this brick, an able from that, a veena from this column, a mridangam from that, knock with your legs, you get a ghatam, if you rattle the chains of the swing, bells ring, a shehnai from pulling the sliding door, blow on the dust: a conch; shake a flower pot: damroo[3].

Finally, Rockwell retains Hindi proverbs and homophonic puns alongside inline English glosses so that the acoustic play of the Hindi original is heard directly by the English reader:

So she whispers her mother's old rhyme of winter: chilla jaara din chaalees, poos ke pandrah, maaghpachees—bitter cold winter for forty days, fifteen for the month of Poos, twenty-five for the month of Magh[3].

Gaya bhi gaya—Gaya is also gone—for where are the remains of that famous seat of learning, the city which was once Gaya? And what of Bodh Gaya? When the brains—the bodh—drained away, it too was gone—voh bhi gaya[3].

In the second excerpt, Shree's pun turns on the Hindi homophone *gaya* (the ancient city of *Gaya* and the past-participle verb *gayā*, "gone") alongside *bodh* ("brains" or "enlightenment"; [3]). Had Rockwell written only "Gaya is also gone", the English reader would miss why the line is witty. Retaining *Gaya bhi gaya* and *voh bhi gaya* alongside their English glosses (ibid.) foregrounds the phonetic charm of the source language, turning the translation into a bilingual performance.

4. Comparative Synthesis and Conclusion

4.1. Cross-Corpus Taxonomy Synthesis

Table 3 synthesizes the diachronic evolution of strategic untranslation across our thirty-year primary corpus, mapping how the four analytical categories operate across Tamil, Bengali, and Hindi literary translations.

Analytical Dimension	Karukku[1]	Chowringhee[2]	Tomb of Sand[3]
Paratextual and Typographical Strategy	Retained Tamil terms supported by an end-of-book Glossary (transitional Newmarkian *transference*; [1]).	Unitalicized Bengali and Hindustani lexemes; zero glossary or footnotes (naturalized *borrowing*; [2]).	Unitalicized Hindi and Urdu lexemes; capitalized as proper nouns and paired with inline rhythmic glosses[3].
1. Kinship and Social Hierarchy	*Annan, Paatti, Ayya, Appa, Thambi, Akka, Machaan, Periamma, Chittappa, Cheri, Paraya jati, Paraichi, Naicker, pannaiyaal, Kotthaal, naataamai, saami*[1].	*babu, Chhoka-da, Arjun-da, Haru-da, Bose-da, Sata-da, Putu-di, Mem-boudi, Saheb-dada, nawab-bahadurs, Rai Bahadur, sahib, khidmatgars, boxwallahs*[2].	*Ma, Amma, Bade, Beti, Bahu, Bhaiya, Daadi, Rosie Bua, Behin ji, Baji, Chamma, hijra, chaprasi, typist babu, Zill-e-Subhani, durbar*[3].
2. Material and Sensory Culture	*karukku, karu, kuuzh, kanji, marakkaal, kuzhambu, kadichukira, kuppaikira, thoyilukkira, silebi kendai, ayirai, vadai, daavani, chappals, veshtis, kuuthu, kummi, pullanguzhal, sapparam, villuppaattu*[1].	*annas, paise, alu-kabli, phuchka, gur, rashogolla-sandesh, dhoti, lungi, Maidan, Ghat, saqi*[2].	*shakkarpara, mathri, baati chokha, tikli, bindi, parandas, kumkum, sindoor, jalebis, imaratis, balushahis, karahi, bharbhara, makuni, sattu, paan, gulkand, supari, safeda, amla, bhringaraj, brahmi*[3].
3. Affective-Philosophical Concepts	*bhakti, Pusai, Guga Pusai, Baalar Sabai, mantiram, bhayam, paasam, pey, pisaasu, ayyangaatchi*[1].	*darshan, fakirs, Kali, Firinghee Kali, Brahma, Brahmo Samaj, Kishenchand, Radhika, Nataraj, Gandhi-ji*[2].	*samādhi, puja, aarti, Kalpataru, mudra, ashtbhuj mudra, bhumi poojan, vastu shastra, Natya Shastra, ghar wapasi, dharamshala, baksheesh, eidi*[3].
4. Acoustic Discourse Markers and Wordplay	*Chi, Che, Ayyo Amma, di, da, Ei, saar, teppa tuuzhu / keppa kuuzhu, oppaari, sanjanakka-sanjanakka, Dalit endru sollada; talai nimirndu nillada*[1].	*Ram Ram!, Jaldi, jaldi mangta, mamlette, hukum, Jaldi jao, Hey Khitmatgar, brandy sharab, bilati pani lao, Markapala*[2].	*arre, chee chee / un-chee chee, ai hai, aji, sa re ga ma, taar saptak, sur, panchtaal, jaltarang, veena, mridangam, ghatam, shehnai, damroo, chilla jaara..., Gaya bhi gaya / voh bhi gaya*[3].

Table 3. Cross-Corpus Synthesis of Strategic Untranslation Across *Karukku*, *Chowringhee*, and *Tomb of Sand*

4.2. Conclusion

Tracing the evolution of lexical retention across *Karukku*[1], *Chowringhee*[2], and *Tomb of Sand*[3] demonstrates that the retention of source-language words in contemporary Indian English translation can no longer be adequately explained through the deficit model of *untranslatability*. Across all four categories of our taxonomy—kinship and social hierarchy, material and sensory culture, affective-philosophical concepts, and

acoustic discourse markers—translators frequently retain *Bhasha* lexemes even when exact English equivalents are available on the very same page[1][3].

Whether Lakshmi Holmström is preserving the double-edged botanical pun of *karukku/karu*[15][1] and the appositional emotional weight of "the fear bhayam" and "love paasam"[1], Arunava Sinha is normalizing unglossed Bengali fictive kinship (*Bose-da*, *Mem-boudi*, *Saheb-dada*; [2]) and street-food nostalgia (*alu-kabli*, *phuchka*; [2]), or Daisy Rockwell is substituting proper names with the alliterative Hindi triad of *Bade*, *Bahu*, and *Beti*[3] while foregrounding homophonic puns (*Gaya bhi gaya*; [3]), *untranslation* functions as an intentional, celebratory aesthetic strategy. By refusing to surrender the sonic charm, relational warmth, and cultural rhythm of *Bhasha* words to clinical English equivalents, twenty-first-century translators do not merely translate Indian literature into English—they compel the English language to expand and inhabit an indigenous Indian sensory world.

Statements and Declarations

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Use of Generative AI

In accordance with the ethical publishing guidelines of *Qeios*, the author discloses that generative artificial intelligence (Google Gemini) was used sparingly during the preparation of this manuscript to assist in organizing the structural taxonomy, formatting bibliographic citations, and polishing academic English style. The core research question, theoretical conceptualization of *untranslation* versus *untranslatability*, selection of primary *Bhasha*-to-English texts, verification of textual quotations, and scholarly arguments are entirely the author's own work, for which the author takes full accountability.

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