

Book Reviews

***Translation & Understanding* by Sukanta Chaudhuri. Published in New Delhi by Oxford University Press, 2010, pp 1- 89, ₹275.00, ISBN 019-564877-3.**

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Sukanta Chaudhuri is Professor of English at Jadavpur University, Kolkata. In his book *Translation & Understanding*, he gives a most catholic vision of the process, result and evaluation of the enterprise of translation that have undergone so far, citing plethora of apt and crisp illustrations. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental & African Studies* reviewed his book in the following manner: 'Chaudhuri employs an amazing diversity of examples with which to illustrate his argument ... The author's style is conversational, evidence that he is completely in control of his material, and effectively communicates his fascination with his subject ... an enjoyable and stimulating read'.¹

The book is divided in four chapters namely *Translation and Cultural Encounter*, *The Translator as Sceptic*, *Translation and Creation* and *Translation and Multilingualism*. In the first chapter he makes a fine case for translation and the cultural encounter. To explain this proposition he illustrates an old sexist quip that a translation is like a woman, either beautiful or faithful but not both, and same is the case of translation. The chapter progresses with the underlying idea of the translation and the cultural encounter where the exchange of the cultural constructs, heritage and linguistic aspects takes place wherein the 'source' and 'target' (Chaudhuri prefers to call it 'host' language) languages both enrich themselves and the readers are supplied umpteen illustrations from Pope's version of *Iliad* and the same of E. V. Rieu, J. M. Edmonds' Hellenistic Greek elegy and the same of Anthony Holden citing considerable difference in the way different translators undertook the work of translation. The chapter closes with the thought that translation is the ground and medium of cultural exchange and is organically invested with destabilizing and distancing factors.

The second chapter is entitled 'The Translator as Sceptic'. This chapter gives a lucid reading on the person of translator and translation as philosophically redoubtable project of transferring a reality from its native verbal habitat to another, and this phenomenon is central to politics of translation also. In this chapter, the author categorically proposes his view and process of translation which actively fosters the relativist standpoint that sees in the translated text a locus of contact to otherwise floating, disparate, contingent structures of culture and communication. This view regards source text and output text as binaries encircling one another.

The third chapter discusses elaborately about the theme 'Translation and Creation' giving rich and profuse illustrations from Rabindranath Thakur's work *Gitanjali* (Song Offerings) where the author was the translator also. The chapter argues that Thakur's 'translation' of English poems seems more and more an inadequate and misleading term to designate them because they constitute nothing less than a parallel creative process. Vladimir Nabokov is also discussed with distinct explanations in the similar plane of the process of transcreation.

The final chapter is titled 'Translation and Multilingualism' wherein the author prepares his case of the translation and multilingualism giving illustration of the Bible, the Quran and Karl Marx, first two being religious texts and the third political, in the multilingual backdrop. The translation of the Bible is explained in multilingual context (the book being one of the most translated texts) the Quran maintaining Arabic language throughout Islamic culture and Karl Marx studied by Lenin and Mao Zedong in their respective cultural and linguistic backgrounds and having enforced its influence in their lives.

The book in general gives a bird's eye view of translation and how the very activity generates the understanding of the 'other'. It also examines formal and linguistic problems in the act of translation taking a cue from a scholarly perspective. The language used in the book is formal with illustrations that grapples the readers with a sense of expectation and guides them through the vista of literary, historical, religious, and political texts. The blurb (front inner flap of the cover jacket) of the book aptly summarizes it:

[t]his volume examines the cultural politics of translation as well as specific linguistic and formal problems, and considers the intricate relationship between the two.

Using his (author's) experience as a scholar of English and European literature as well as practicing translator from Bengali to English, Sukanta Chaudhuri brings together a very wide range of examples, both of specific texts and of cultural periods and milieus: European literature from classical times through the early modern period to the twentieth century; Indian literature from the last two centuries, including recent Indian writing in English; and religious and political texts ranging from the Bible to Karl Marx.

This range of material provides an unusually broad base for Chaudhuri's discussion of translation and its techniques, purposes, and effects. He uses his literary and cultural analysis to propose a position of philosophic scepticism in conjunction with social exchange and political tolerance.

His argument, which examines translation as an act both of subversion and of creativity, will be illuminating for anyone interested in literature and cultural politics.