

Someshwar Sati and G.J.V. Prasad, eds. *Disability in Translation: The Indian Experience*. New Delhi: Routledge, 2019. 262 pp. ISBN 9780367333874.



Disability Studies is emerging as a significant area of academic enquiry, but it is different because it seeks to open up various facets of human existence. The word disability arouses empathy, indifference, shock, pity, concern, disapproval and ridicule in a way that neither gender nor race could ever elicit. It is still an unexplored terrain that demands to be read, reviewed and written about. The book edited by Someshwar Sati and G.J.V Prasad is important because it deals with an area which in their own words is waiting to be “recognized as a discursive political entity” (2). As a contrapuntal mode, Translation studies and Disability studies have come together to create a symbiosis between the two. The Introduction elaborates translation as an “enabling act” that seeks to open up space for those Indian texts stories which have talked of disability that bring out the painful predicament of their subjects, where bodies have been ostracised and stigmatised as abnormal or deviant.

In her essay “A Different Idiom” Radha Chakravarty speaks of a charged intimacy between the act of translation and the subject of disability. In her incisive analysis she sees both on the margins as subjects of discrimination. Her

focus is on four stories, namely Tagore's "Mahamaya," Mahasweta Devi's "Sindhubala," Debes Ray's "Ranju's Blood" and Rizia Rahman's "Irina's Picture." If Chitra Harshvardhan's essay "Translation as Social Action" looks at Rangeya Raghav's *Goongey* as a story that was extremely challenging, "provoking introspection" (48) and encouraging self-reflection in the process of translation, Shubhra Dubey rues the lack of critical tools in teaching *Goongey* to the CBCS students (Choice Based Credit System implemented for teaching undergraduate classes by the University Grants Commission in India). B. Mangalam opens her essay with a series of questions directed at the translator and concludes with an emphasis on her being an attentive listener to be able to capture the voice of the disabled.

Himani Kapoor in "Gitopadesha on Wheelchairs and Crutches" writes about performance of people with special needs on stage as "a counter-aesthetic of ability" (61). It is interesting to read about Pasha's Ability Unlimited that has physically disabled artists playing the role of Krishna and wheelchairs as symbolic of "Chariots of War" (61). Such subversive performances add an alternative discourse in Disability Studies. Rajashree Bargohain, Somrita Ganguly and Ananya Ghosal engage with Asamiya and Bengali writings. Shefalee Jain and Deeba Zafir consider the difficulties faced in translating the poetic idiom from Urdu to English. Each language is embedded within its own distinct locale and history. The vulnerability of the disabled is inadequately represented and calls for a revision. Subhadeep Ray stresses the need to acknowledge translating disability across cultures as a weapon that empowers and sees "difference" in translation not as a "loss" but as a "gain" (136).

The book primarily deals with the complexities involved in translating the narratives of disability. It shows the inadequacy and the ambivalence associated with the disintegrating effects of the able vis-à-vis the disabled. In "Disabling Normalcy in *Thakara*," Sanju Thomas talks about the shift from short story to film adaptation and the change in perspective where "the film becomes what the story is not" (82). Mukul Chaturvedi in her essay, "Gendering Disability in Dharamvir Bharti's *Gulki Banno*," highlights how socio-cultural and religious injunctions impact women differently. It becomes important to ascertain that most of these essays focus on physical disability/impairment. It is unfortunate that intellectually challenged people have still not been able to draw attention to their plight. Most of the characters in the texts, be it Rashid Jahan's *Wob* or Tagore's "Subha," or Chaliha's *Beethoven*, suffer because of physical impairment.

There is a need to assess the problematics associated with intellectual disability. On the one hand we have characters who can assert themselves and on the other there are those who have no voice of their own, nor are they equipped to handle their lives. It is this dilemma of how to represent those who have no representation whatsoever that is a major challenge to the field of disability studies. I agree this is not within the purview of this enterprise, but as

theorists and translators it is significant that we connect with people in the area of disability, those who encounter, engage, involve with the disabled on an everyday basis might also provide insights which will add to our understanding of the subject. One can detect a definite puzzling tilt towards certain areas of disability and I hope the contributors and translators will shift their attention in the course of their future research as this will certainly add a particular strength to the discourse. Shilpa Das' essay on *Lobini Sagai* is one such exception that deals with specific challenges faced by the translator while dealing with "mental retardation" (183).

The tension between ideological, ethical and aesthetic perspectives is of primary concern for most of the scholars involved in the process of translation. Ritwick Bhattacharjee in his essay "The Politics of Translation: Disability, Language and the In-between" questions rightly "the homogenising tendency of language" (206) to usurp one space over the other. Essays by Rohini Mokashi Punekar, Shilpaa Anand and Sania Hashmi not only demonstrate their scholarly insights but also explicate the need for such an exercise in a non-Western cultural context. Shilpaa Anand turns to the dilemmas faced by the participants when they were asked to choose a disability text. I also wish the stories that have been translated by these scholars were included in a separate volume or added as an appendix to the present one. English translators of the Indian stories in this volume from Asamiya, Bangla, Gujarati, Hindi, Marathi, Odiya, Kannada, Tamil and Urdu languages succinctly look beneath and beyond the socio-cultural matrix by focusing on the need to making disabled characters visible to the non-disabled readers. What is clear is that most of the translators have not only faced challenges in the form of critical and linguistic register, but have looked at the relative inadequacy of the existing models to address the subject. It is also equally important to note that apart from the two editors of the book who happen to be men, there are only two male contributors; women with a distinct feminist ideology represent the issues linked with disability in a world defined by men. Not just the critics but I hope more women writers will enter the imaginary sites and write with a deeper understanding about the worlds inhabited by the dis/differently/abled.

The book raises some very pertinent questions about the non-inclusion, marginalisation, erasure and absence of the disabled from the Indian socio-political-cultural fabric. By choosing to focus on disability literature that cuts across regions, castes, gender and languages, the scholars give us hope that new interpretations will lead to a better understanding of the collective consciousness and the individual enterprise linked with the debate. Disability theorists Lennard Davis, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Erving Goffman, David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder occupy a special place and are the referral points to the volume. It is important for disability scholars to devote themselves to theorising the act of translation by choosing non-Western tools to examine, interpret and represent

the Indian condition. Looking outwards must also lead to the relevance of looking inwards for herein lies the true spirit of objective enquiry.

The editors and contributors to the volume deserve a special commendation for supporting a project of this magnitude with critical insights and by demonstrating the need to examine disability studies and translation within India as axioms of human existence. It is time to notice the differently-abled as human beings and reinforce the need for equal rights and a life with dignity for all. The inexplicable silencing of the other must stop.

Ranu Uniyal
University of Lucknow, India
Email: ranuuniyalpant@gmail.com