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From *Aag ka Darya* to *River of Fire*: Forging Identity Through Self-Translation

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Abstract

Qurratulain Hyder's magnum opus *Aag ka Darya*, has frequently been compared to the oeuvre of Gabriel Garcia Marquez for its innovative narrative structure and its emplotment of serially incarnating characters across time; however it is perhaps her act of self-translation that is the most original feature of her work. *River of Fire*, her translation, or transcreation as she calls it, transcends a textual transfer of words; the two texts create a metatext which demand to be read as a quest for wholeness. Hyder's novel, first written in the direct aftermath of Partition in Urdu, chronicles the various ages of a composite, syncretic India; the communalism that led to fracturing of the country provokes a similar dislocation in Hyder—not only does she suffer the loss of home, but also of language. Andre Lefevere, Susan Bassnett and Lawrence Venuti have highlighted the codependency of culture and language, but the works of other bilingual writers such as Samuel Beckett and Vladimir Nabokov have prompted scholars to consider a deeper connection of language with the self. A close reading of both texts, the Urdu and the English, points to a pattern of variances; these dissimilarities, far from being mistranslations when seen within conventional translation studies, actually create a 'third space,' allowing for a resolution of identity. As in the case of other bilinguals, Urdu and English represent not two linguistic and semiotic codes, but, instead, offer Hyder an enhanced medium better suited to tell the story of an absorptive India 'stereoscopically,' in some ways preempting Salman Rushdie's creation of a 'new English'—the language of the translated self.

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I.

Introduction

In his collection of essays *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie writes: “The word translation comes, etymologically, from the Latin for ‘bearing across’. Having been borne across the world we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately to the notion that something can also be gained.” The idea that it is possible to translate people—identities—rather than words and texts is intriguing, especially when considering the practice of self-translation. Why would a writer revisit their work in another language? There may indeed be a certain amount of authorial vanity in believing they are uniquely positioned to tell their story in another tongue, but could there be deeper, more primordial urge to self-translate, a quest for the self? By looking at the self-translations of one specific subcontinental writer, Qurratulain Hyder, within the larger context of translation theory and bilingual writings, I hope to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of what is the “something gained” in translation.

This thesis demonstrates that Hyder’s self-translation, or transcreation as she prefers to call it, moves well beyond a textual transfer of words from one language to another; by creating two similar but altogether different texts, Hyder produces a metatext that reconciles the two. M. Asaduddin, writing on Hyder and her art of fiction, mentions *Aag ka Darya* and “its relentless quest for wholeness.” He identifies Hyder’s belief in the composite culture of India as a persistent leitmotif in her work, quoting her words “you

have to be a native, born and bred in this land to understand the cultural richness as well as the contradictions and frictions inherent in this situation.” By building on existing scholarship on translation, and specifically on self-translation, I argue that Hyder’s translation is an attempt not just to understand the ‘contradictions and frictions’ of her native land, a country she identifies with so deeply, but more a more meaningful probe into the contradictions and frictions of her own identity.

Qurratulain Hyder was born in India during the dying days of the British Raj; but even as the demand for independence was gathering momentum across the subcontinent, the affluent upper middle-class Muslim population continued to exist within a highly anglicized society rooted in Victorian values and ethos. As a civil servant, Hyder’s father was very much part of the British imperial apparatus, and her early years were spent in a series of colonial outposts and convent schools. However, various members of her family, including her parents, were also writers, part of a larger indigenous intelligentsia that remained deeply connected to a pan-Indian syncretism espoused by the Mughal court. It is this ‘synthesis’ and ‘contradiction’ that she attempts to express in her magnum opus *Aag ka Darya*.

As a young woman of twenty, Hyder migrated to the newly created state of Pakistan in 1947, and it is here that she wrote *Aag ka Darya*, a novel Asaduddin refers to as “essentially a study of the absorptive culture of India and the growth of an Indian consciousness over the ages.” In her other works, Hyder has often written of the trauma of Partition, so it is certainly interesting that she chooses to write an Indian epic once she has abandoned the land of her birth, but it is even more intriguing, that having returned to India for good in 1961, she then chooses to revisit her novel, translating it into English,

the language of the one people she believes failed to absorb into India, indeed leaving it torn asunder.

Over the years, literary critics have speculated on the reasons behind her decision to self-translate. Many have claimed that she hoped to attract a larger, more international readership with an English version, but did not trust her narrative with another translator. However, throughout her life, Hyder referred to the English version not as a translation but as a transcreation. Even a cursory read through the Urdu and English versions reveals significant variances between the two—variances that cannot be explained by linguistic differences between Urdu and English which require modulation for the sake of fluency in the English text. There can be no doubt that Hyder has rewritten her story almost four decades later. The question is, to what purpose? Is her need to self-translate her attempt in creating an oeuvre more consistent with her personal hybridity?

André Lefevere claims that “translation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text (xi).” Lefevere, a pioneer in the field of translation studies, elaborates on the need to see translation as more than an exercise in linguistic equivalence. He and Susan Bassnett argue that literary translation is in fact cultural interaction. In both versions of her work, Hyder is at great pains to highlight how India is built upon and enriched by a series of continual cultural interactions. Hyder’s two novels trace over two millennia of Indian history; a small host of central characters are incarnated in four eras: Vedantic/ Buddhist, Muslim conquest, British Raj and modern-day nation state. The first three episodes are linked not just by the repeating names (and characteristics) of the protagonists, but also by the underlying theme of India enchanting and embracing the stranger, the other. The last episode, immediately preceding and following Partition, depicts what Asaduddin

calls “the disorientation of a people who, for no fault of their own found themselves strangers in the country of their birth one fine morning.” I argue that by translating her work, Hyder is attempting to restore continuity to the tradition of Indian syncretism, interrupted by Partition.

According to Lefevere, the study of a translated text can provide “a synchronic snapshot of many features of a given culture at a given time (6).” In order to better understand the snapshot of Indian culture presented by Hyder’s *River of Fire* it is important to contextualize Urdu and English within the linguistic makeup of the subcontinent. In his book *After Babel*, George Steiner wonders at the multiplicity of languages, surprising, given the otherwise universality of human experience. He claims that “there is no mythology known to us in which the fragmentation of some initial single language (the Adamic motif) into jagged bits, into cacophony, and incommunicado, has not been felt to be a catastrophe (xiii).” India has of course always been multilingual yet, for a substantial part of its history, Urdu functioned as a sort of lingua franca. The Partition of India demoted Urdu into a regional vernacular and made English the de facto universal language of India. The first part of this thesis will focus on positioning Urdu and English into their proper context within Indian history and culture—key to understanding the necessity and appropriateness of an English version of Hyder’s work.

In the context of translation studies, English is seen as a dominant language, one used to marginalize minority languages. Lawrence Venuti has argued that English translations of texts in non-Western languages valorize Western values and culture by “domesticating” the text to make it easier to read. This view is not without controversy as scholars like Maria Tymoczko and Tarek Shamma have claimed that on the contrary, it is

by “foreignizing” or exoticizing the original text that translation becomes a tool of cultural colonization. Tymoczko compares the role of the translator to that of the post-colonial writer and claims that both are engaged in an exercise of interpretation and how they choose to interpret the text or narrative will be influenced by the intended audience of the work. Whether or not Hyder can be considered a post-colonial writer is worth exploring, but even more interesting is an analysis of her translation, her chosen interpretation, in order to identify the intended audience for her English text. When *Aag ka Darya* was first published in Pakistan in 1959 it caused instant controversy. The novel was widely read on both sides of the border; in Pakistan it was almost immediately condemned for being anti-Pakistan and pro-India, in India she won several prestigious literary awards. When *River of Fire* was published it received critical acclaim in a *Times Literary Supplement* review; the reviewer, Aamer Hussein wrote that she “has a place alongside her exact contemporaries Milan Kundera and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, as one of the world’s major living writers.” Jean-Marie Le Clézio mentioned her in his Nobel acceptance speech in 2008, in and yet Hyder remains unknown in the canon of what has come to be known as World Literature. The second part of this thesis will focus on arriving at a better understanding of Hyder’s intended audience for her translation. I argue that rather than trying to find a wider readership for her oeuvre, Hyder was truly writing for people like herself—the multilinguals like Hussein and Le Clézio—the inbetweeners.

While the question of intended audience is critical both to translation studies in general and to the study of self-translations in particular, the concept of motive is less important, or less meaningful in translation in general. Traditionally, self-translation has

been an under-researched area of translation studies, a fact bemoaned in Jan Hokenson's work. She has claimed that "the historical drives towards self-translation originate also, if not chiefly, from micro-level, private and especially literary ambitions (Cordingley, 54)." The scholarship on self-translation remains fractured, often focuses more on individual writers than on generalized theory. There is, for example, a significant amount of scholarship on Samuel Beckett. Beckett is a particularly interesting case, often writing in the 'foreign' language and translating into his native 'language', or sometimes alternating writing and translating between the two within the same text. Writers like Beckett and Nancy Huston highlight Steiner's claim that "the bilingual person does not 'see the difficulties [in translation],' the frontier between the two languages is not sharp enough in his mind (125)." Comparing the work of Huston and Beckett, Almeida and Veras quote from a talk she gave where she says:

God, how I long to say Okay, folks, enough of all this schtick. From now on, I'm gonna write all my books in... and choose one of the languages. But which one? Handicapped in both, not happy, not satisfied, because if you've got two languages, you haven't really "got" any language at all.

It is significant that both Beckett and Huston lived most of their lives in self-imposed exile and worthwhile to consider to what extent Hyder finds herself in perpetual exile—unhomed as it were. In the third part of this thesis I will build on the ideas presented by Almeida and Veras on Huston and Beckett, and those explored by Loredana Polezzi in her work on translation and migration in general, which demonstrate that the bilingual's sense of always being between two languages is mirrored in their perception of existing in between two places, two cultures.

Rushdie, who in many ways shares the same cultural and linguistic heritage as Hyder, writes

Indian writers in these islands, like others who have migrated into the north from the south, are capable of writing from a kind of double perspective: because they, we, are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders in this society. This stereoscopic vision is perhaps what we can offer instead of 'whole sight' (19).

By writing an Urdu and an English version of her tale, by presenting India in this 'stereoscopic vision' Hyder is attempting to reunite herself—both the insider and the outsider—in her India, her imaginary homeland.

II.

Source/Target: Contextualizing Urdu and English in the Indian Subcontinent

In one of the most comprehensive introductions to the field, *Translation Studies*, Susan Bassnett states that “the first step towards an examination of the processes of translation must be to accept that although translation has a central core of linguistic activity, it belongs most properly to *semiotics* (22).” It is an oft-repeated fact that the discipline has moved well beyond its initial position on translation as a derivative activity of linguistic equivalence from source to target language, and one long-intuited by practitioners. In *River of Fire*, Talat understands the difficulty of translation: “Translate Urdu poetry into English? How can you render *jiggar ki aag* as the liver’s fire (275)?” she wonders. Kamal echoes her feelings when he hears a song from his childhood: “Can I translate this classical melody and the emotions they convey to me into English (308)?” In expressing her characters’ bewilderment Hyder is acutely aware that translation requires a transference of meaning and significance from one language to another that goes beyond linguistics.

Bassnett goes on to quote Edward Sapir: “language is a guide to social reality,” he says (22). The social aspect has now become central to any analysis of translation theory and practice. Venuti’s early work on the subject helped shape a narrative of translation whereby foreign texts were incorporated into a Western canon through translation strategies that valorized Western values and perpetuated an ethnocentric and imperialist cultural ethos. The idea of more or less ‘important’ languages has long permeated any discussion of translation. Bassnett traces the idea of ‘vertical’ versus ‘horizontal’

translation through the ages—starting with Roger Bacon and Dante who she claims “were well aware of the differences between translating from ancient languages into Latin and translating contemporary texts into the vernacular (59),” to Edward Fitzgerald’s claim that “it is an amusement to me to take what liberties I like with these Persians, who, (as I think) are not Poets enough to frighten one from such excursions, and who really do want a little Art to shape them (14).” It is precisely proclamations of this nature that led Venuti to assert that all translation was an act of violence, an act perpetuating the “reconstitution of the foreign text in accordance with values, beliefs and representations that preexist in the target language, always configured in hierarchies of dominance and marginality (18).”

Echoes of Venuti’s views are littered throughout *River of Fire*; towards the end of the novel Kamal laments that “The Upanishads were introduced in Europe through Dara Shikoh’s book, but only the Orientalist who translated the Persian book is remembered, not the unfortunate and amazing Mughal prince (393).” And yet, I contend that Hyder’s translation, or transcreation, must be seen beyond the framework of linguistic and cultural hierarchy that has shaped translation studies, and more specifically the postcolonial subgenre. It would be reductive and myopic to read *River of Fire* as simply one more example of traditional North-South dynamics, of metropolitan power and colonial subordination. Writing more or less at the same time as Hyder was translating her work, Homi Bhabha exhorts the student of cultural studies to remember that the prefix in postcolonial, postmodern etc. should not be read as a sequential term, but as a directive to go beyond. It is precisely this going beyond boundaries—national, linguistic, temporal—that Hyder attempts with her transcreation. Bhabha writes that “these ‘in-between’ spaces

provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative signs of collaboration and, contestation in the act of defining the idea of society itself (2).” There can be no doubt that the subject of both of Hyder’s novels is what she perceives to be the true essence of Indian society—the absorptive and syncretic nature of its culture through the ages. Partition, and its drawing of boundaries where none existed, creates a crisis of identity not just for India, but also for Hyder. By writing and rewriting her novel, by exploring and expanding linguistic boundaries, Hyder creates an ‘in-between’ space where she hopes to reconcile identity.

Bassnett likens language to the heart of the body of culture and claims the two act together to create what she terms ‘life-energy.’ To support her argument she quotes from Soviet semiotician Juri Lotman: “No language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture, and no culture can exist which does not have at its center, the structure of natural language,” he says (23). The dual premises in his statement offer an intriguing point of departure for an analysis of Hyder’s quest. In order to arrive at a discussion of motive and audience, two key elements to understanding Hyder’s translation, I believe it is first important to address the issue of the languages at the heart of the matter. Does India have a ‘natural language’? Is Urdu steeped in the context of an Indian culture? What of English? The first half of this chapter will focus on Urdu, its origins, its milieu and finally its politicization and bifurcation. The second half of this chapter will investigate to what extent English can be viewed, not as the language of the colonizer, but as an Indian language, a language of mediation. By contextualizing Urdu and English within the Indian subcontinent, I hope to offer clues regarding the intended audience and the motives behind Hyder’s decision to self-translate.

Urdu: A Tale of Coming Together and Falling Out

Elena Di Giovanni, while discussing the work of Sujit Mukherjee, a pioneer in translation studies in the Indian context, writes that Sanskrit was the official language of writing and scriptures in India, engendering a host of vernaculars and contributing to a ‘pan-Indian’ ethos rooted in Sanskrit origins. After the British colonization of India, she claims that English took over this unifying role, and became the master language “absorbing texts, ideas and traditions (105).” While it is difficult to quibble with the Sanskrit origins of ancient Indian texts, or the ubiquity of English in postcolonial India, it is worth pausing over the centuries Di Giovanni glosses over. The reality of linguistic evolution and multilingualism in India is far more complex and layered than the smooth transition from an ancient Ur-Sprache to a modern monolingualism implied by Di Giovanni.

By the end of the Lodi dynasty and the rise of the Mughals in the 15th century, the era depicted in the second episode of *Aag Ka Darya*, Sanskrit was already a relic. When the Persian Kamaluddin arrives in India he goes to see the sultan in Jaunpur; Alauddin Hussain Shah, the current sultan who had recently overthrown the Abyssinian rulers of the area is suitably impressed with Kamaluddin’s mastery of Arabic, Persian, Turkish and Greek and appoints him to the Bureau of Translations with the instruction to learn Sanskrit. Kamaluddin mentions that “Like Feroze Shah Tughlaq who had a lot of Sanskrit works rendered into Persian, Hussain Shah was also an antiquarian (67).” It is perhaps pertinent to note that Feroze Shah Tughlaq was the Turkic ruler of Delhi in the 14th century.

While the first Muslim incursions into India started in the 7th century under the Arabic-speaking Umayyads, it was only by the 10th century that Muslims, now Persian-speaking Ghaznavids, began to control large swathes of India. Almost immediately Persian became the de facto administrative and literary language of India. Kinga Maciuszak, in her study of Persian lexicography in the Indian subcontinent states that Persian soon “achieved the rank of the most prominent language (184).” The formation of the Delhi Sultanate in 1206 further cemented Persian’s influence on the daily and cultural life of India. By the advent of the Lodi dynasty, Persian had even permeated the Hindu administrative classes. In his book on social communication and intelligence gathering in the early days of the East India Company, Bayly writes that when the British first arrived in the early 18th century, they found that their entry into and understanding of Mughal court etiquette and politics depended upon their relationship with what Bayly calls “its chief expert, the Persian munshi (284).”

But even as Warren Hastings, the first de facto British Governor General of India, continued to patronize the study and use of Persian, the language was already declining in importance, certainly outside the direct influence of the various Muslim courts. Bayly observes that by “1760 the massive growth of military activity along the Ganges valley and swell of speculation and trade in its slip-stream led to an interest in ‘Moors’ or the ‘vulgar tongue of Hindostan’ written in the Persian script (284).” Even as early as the late 15th century depicted in the second episode of Hyder’s epic, Sultan Hussain Shah may well have spoken to the foreigner Kamaluddin in Persian, however, Kamaluddin notes that the king speaks to his aide-de-camp in “the local Hindvi language (66).”

According to Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, ‘Hindvi’ was one of the earliest known names for the language called Urdu today; it has also been referred to as Hindi, Dehlavi, Gujri, Deccani and Rekhtah, often concurrently and interchangeably. While many books have been written on the origins of modern Hindi (some of them more fictional than factual), very little scholarship exists on the development and evolution of the Urdu language. The reasons for this are manifold and critical to an understanding of Hyder’s *Aag Ka Darya* as well as the *River of Fire*. Faruqi is one of a handful of writers who have attempted a history of Urdu and it is pertinent to quote him at some length here:

Using the term ‘early Urdu’ is not without its risks. ‘Urdu’ as a language name is of comparatively recent origin, and the question of what was or is early Urdu has long since passed from the realm of history, first into the colonialist constructions of the history of Urdu/ Hindi, and then into the political and emotional space of Indian (Hindu) identity in modern India. (805)

It is, perhaps, best to proceed as Faruqi does, by first tackling the origins of the name ‘Urdu’ before exploring the colonialist bifurcation of one language into two and a subsequent rewriting of the origins of those languages better suited to newly formed national identities—an exploration that is bound to be fraught with polemic.

The word ‘Urdu’ is not without controversy either—the myth persists that the origins of the word Urdu lie in the Turkish word for army ‘ordu’, (interestingly the English word ‘horde’ also originates from ordu), and that the language, along with its Persian script, was imported into India by invading Mongols. In fact, as Faruqi points out, the name Urdu is first used in the late 18th century, and is part of a longer expression, *zaban-e-urdu-e mu’alla-e shahjahanabad*, which translates to: the language of the exalted court of Shahjahanabad (Delhi), and refers to Persian, which was at the time the court language in Delhi (806). It was then repeatedly truncated to arrive at its final

form—urdu—although still referring to the official Indo-Persian language of the court. The language denoted by the name Urdu today only became commonly spoken in Delhi after Shah Alam II, the sixteenth Mughal emperor ascended the throne of a crumbling empire, and he called it Hindi.

The myth's endurance is astonishing given its flimsy foundations. Two Englishmen, Yule and Burnell published a sort of historical dictionary of colloquial Anglo-Indian words and expressions and gave it the catchy title of *Hobson-Jobson*.¹ In their dictionary Yule and Burnell claimed that the word urdu was brought to India by Babur and referred to the language spoken at his court in Delhi. Faruqi invalidates this assertion quite easily—he states that there were many Turks in India prior to Babur, Babur never held court in Delhi and finally, and most conclusively, the language Hindvi/ Dehlavi/ Hindi was already in use around Delhi before Babur's arrival in India. However, the myth proved useful to the newly arrived British, who had greater plans for India.

Sushil Srivastava, who has contributed significantly to the (highly unpopular and hotly contested) opinion that modern Hindi is in fact an entirely made-up construct with no historic antecedents whatsoever, claims that the British struggled to come to terms with the discovery that a single tongue was widely spoken and understood throughout the subcontinent. Their insistence on referring to the locals as Muslims or non-Muslims compounded their difficulties as they could not imagine a non-Muslim population communicating in a Perso-Arabic script, which to them was primarily a Muslim script. Srivastava points out that the English were at such pains to find an alternative script for

¹ Hobson-Jobson is a corruption of the cry Ya Hasan, Ya Hussain chanted by mourners during Muharram commemorations by Shia Muslims. The repetitive quality of the title mimics rhyming duplication so popular in South Asian languages, but also refers to Victorian characters depicting a pair of bumbling fools.

the non-Muslims that when missionaries arrived at Serampore they resorted to using the Roman script whilst disseminating Christianity among the locals (220). He claims that the College of Fort William set up in the early 19th century to train British officials in Indian languages was instrumental in the effort to “differentiate languages in terms of script and vocabulary” (219). Not only was the Devanagari script first introduced to the Hindi language by the British, but they also encouraged a bifurcation of the language into two forms—Urdu, with its Persian and Arabic sources and Hindi, increasingly purged of its Perso-Arabic lexicon and supplemented by Sanskrit origin words. While Srivastava believes that no attempt was made by the British to give a religious color to the languages, it did eventually lead to the Nagari-Hindi movement, which was successful in relating language to religion, espousing an ideal of Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan which engendered “a culture that challenged the traditional, composite, culture of India (228).”

Sociologist A. Aneesh echoes this line of thinking in his paper on the construction of linguistic nationalism in India: “Bloody Language.” He suggests that there is no one universal aspect that can be consistently considered a basis for nationhood and that, perhaps in the Indian case, lacking a natural national identity, one was created by constructing boundaries, linguistic as well as religious. He uses a cognitive concept of ‘total closure’ (inscribing certain attributes within a boundary and positioning them in opposition to another set of attributes) to show that “a national system—even in the absence of prior ethnic, religious or linguistic unity—can constitute such a unity from thin air, acting as a foundation of its own foundation (88).” Rather than finding a country rife with Hindu/Muslim sectarianism, Aneesh implies that through a process of ‘lumping’

and ‘splitting’ one language into two scripts/traditions, the British created an environment that led inevitably to communalism and the creation of two nation-states.

Linguist Robert King, who has studied Hindi-Urdu script development, takes a different view: “It would be going too far to blame Hindi-Urdu digraphia for the partition of British India into the separate nations India and Pakistan,” he says (57). It is pertinent to note that his analysis of the evolution of Hindi and Urdu into two separate languages not just in terms of script but with a widening gap in lexicography, is rooted in the more mainstream (certainly in India) position, institutionalized by scholars such as Amrit Rai, that both Hindi and Urdu derive from Khari Boli, spoken in Madhyadesh (literally midlands) in northern India since the arrival of the Indo-Aryans. He further elaborates that as Indo-European languages, Khari Boli and its derivatives are ill-suited to a semitic script. He believes that the adoption of a Perso-Arabic script for languages as diverse as Turkish, Swahili and Urdu was coerced by the influence of Islam. He makes it a point to note that modern Swahili and Turkish have since switched to Roman script. He also claims that by the 19th century, the Devanagari script enjoyed greater popularity among the common people rather than Perso-Arabic. King’s understanding of the popularity of Devanagari may be based upon the fact pointed out by Srivastava that after 1868, with the support of the British administration, publications in Devanagari script far out paced those in Urdu. “However,” he notes, “this trend is not evident in the circulation of newspapers. Urdu newspapers continued to dominate the scene, which clearly indicates Urdu’s popularity among the general literate population (224).”

The conflicting opinions and theories introduced so far serve to highlight the emotional biases and controversy that continue to surround the study of the origins of

Urdu-Hindi and their subsequent evolution. The one point of agreement between all sides is that there was certainly one common language spoken and understood by the large majority of the inhabitants of India before the arrival of the British. There is also little disagreement that by the time they left, not only did the people no longer identify with a common language, they no longer belonged to the same country. King concurs that Hindi-Urdu digraphia can be read as a metaphor for the division of a people. For our purposes, it is perhaps useful to recognize in this metaphor the echo of one of the earliest metaphors relating to language:

And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech... And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. And the Lord said, 'Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.' So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.
(Genesis:11 KJV)

English in India

“What do we lose when we lose a language,” asks Verna Kirkness, as advocate for indigenous languages in Canada; “the short answer is we lose our culture,” she answers, echoing Lotman’s views on the codependency of language and culture (Iseke-Barnes, 58). It is compelling to view Hyder’s rewriting of *Aag ka Darya* in English as a reclaiming of the culture she lost in the post-Babel of Partition. But why write in English, the language of the colonizer, the very people who rent her language and country apart? Tymoczko puts forth an interesting understanding of translation, when she likens it to a process whereby

venerable and holy (historical, mythic and literary) relics are moved from one sanctified spot of worship to another more central and more secure

(because more powerful) location, at which the cult is intended to be preserved, take root and find new life. (19-20)

It is, I believe, a productive analogy: Hyder tenderly transporting her ‘holy relic’, a cyclical epic of the universality of human experience, appropriately set within the context of a composite India, from Urdu—the once dominant Indian language now demoted to mere vernacular of a minority group—to English—the powerful language that transcends borders and mimics the absorptive qualities she ascribes to India (and that were once associated with Urdu). In order to fully explore Hyder’s motivations it is important to first consider the position and role of English in Indian society.

First, like with the origins of Urdu in India, it is necessary to dispel certain myths: English did not enter India as a colonial language; it had effectively infiltrated many levels of society well before the establishment of British Crown Rule in 1858. In his history of Indian-English literature, Vinay Dharwadker provides a neat summary of the introduction of English into India. He claims that after his Restoration in 1660, Charles II gave the East India Company practically unlimited powers to act as they chose, which prompted the arrival of over a hundred factors in India immediately, growing over the years, creating a stable community not just of Englishmen, but an intriguing framework, albeit at the edges and margins of the vast subcontinent, for the dissemination of the English language. Dharwadker suggests four contact zones which prompted Indians to acquire English and become “accultured”: employment opportunities, intermarriage, religious conversions and friendship and social interactions all created environments for the learning of language and mores. In all these cases, the new English speakers enjoyed a position approximating a degree of social equality. However, key to the whole process was “the prior literate bilingualism or multilingualism of many of its Indian participants.”

Implicit in Dharwadker's analysis is an early social stratification of English-speakers in India, which would eventually lead to an ambivalent status of English, unique to India.

By the 19th century with *kampany sarkar* or Company Rule firmly entrenched, formal English education came to play a more influential role. In 1865 the British finally phased out Persian as the official administrative language, replacing it with English, giving rise to a whole new group of Indians keen to acquire the language of their masters, as it offered them social mobility and ironically, freedom. This Anglicized clerical or *babu* class came to be derided by both the English and the Indians, but as Amir Mufti demonstrates in his book *Forget English!* that unlike the view espoused by early translation theorists, based on studies of Orientalism:

the effectiveness of colonial rule extends also to the *ascription* of culture, tradition, and “originality” to the colonized, not simply to their destruction or denigration, and, second, that in neoliberal postcolonialism (to coin a phrase) the place of English in the relationship between dominant imperial centers and dominated peripheries takes both a much-expanded and dramatically different form. (15)

Dharwadker explains how in the British territories while English came to dominate in the workplace, Indians remained reluctant to use it to communicate in domestic settings. The Indian states which remained outside direct British rule did not adopt English as the language of the court and administration, however the privileged and powerful classes within these states became increasingly Anglicized. He concludes that “English thus did not *replace* one or more Indian languages, but *displaced* them as it jostled for a position in a new hierarchy of languages (236).”

This idea of ‘displacement’ of language is critical for Hyder. Hyder, multilingual from birth, like many of her compatriots, *chose* to write *Aag ka Darya* in Urdu because

the language—with its layered, complex origins and a lexicon that drew extensively on the tongues of the many peoples, native and foreign, that had made India theirs—best reflected the India she celebrates in her masterpiece, composite, absorptive and syncretic. Tymoczko notes that many postcolonial writers choose to write about their countries of origin once outside the country, the distance not just giving them perspective, but also releasing them from the ideological pressures inherent within (24). It bears repeating that Hyder wrote *Aag ka Darya* in the late 1950s in Pakistan, the new nation-state that would never be her country. By the time she wrote the novel, globally Urdu had fallen victim to the narrative that it was a language alien to India; the militant origins of its name and character were stressed upon, while its newly-created avatar, Hindi, was given roots in the ancient and “pure” language of scripture. As India celebrated its independence it also celebrated a new identity: Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan. Urdu, Muslim, Pakistan became the flipside of that identity and neither nation was tolerant of any other combination. Munshi Premchand, perhaps one of the greatest Indian prose writers (and father to Amrit Rai, one of the most prominent advocates of the ancient origins of Hindi), dramatically stopped writing in Urdu and switched to Hindi. Was it possible for a Muslim to write the great Indian epic in Urdu?

The answer, perhaps even to Hyder, was a clear ‘no.’ But then which language would best fulfil the same function—a language widely understood across India and one that shared the absorptive characteristics of Hyder’s India? Mufti examines the way that the cultural system of English allows it to assimilate influences from various languages and cultures. He writes that

it is an element in the social situation (and power) of English worldwide that it can assume an aura of universality and transparency, including as a language of theory and criticism, *disappearing* from view precisely as it assumes various mediating and officiating functions. (17)

English's ability to function as "a vanishing mediator," in Mufti's words, is precisely the reason why it becomes the perfect receptacle and vehicle for the "translation" of Hyder's Indian epic back to its shores. The act of lingual transposition thus truly becomes an exercise in semiotics—the transference of meaning and symbol.

III:

Domestication/ Foreignization: Who is the Intended Reader?

The lack of an international readership and a global awareness of her work were certainly of some concern to Hyder; in 1982 she asked Khalid Hasan “tell me, how does one get published in *Vilayat?* (206).” She was bemused by the fact that lesser subcontinental writers were not only managing to get published, but even garnering good reviews in the international press. It should follow, then, that her English translation of *Aag ka Darya* be seen as her attempt to enlarge her readership. Yet, despite a very favorable review in the *Times Literary Supplement* and a mention in Le Clézio’s Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Hyder remains largely unknown outside the Urdu-speaking diaspora, even among students of World Literature. I contend that the reason Hyder hasn’t been read more extensively in the Western world is because the Western reader wasn’t the primary intended reader for *River of Fire*. There is consensus in translation studies scholarship that the intended audience of the text in the target language will determine which strategy the translator will adopt: a domestication of the text—making the source text and cultural references more available to the target reader—or a foreignization—in which case the objective of the translator is to highlight the ‘otherness’ of the text. I suggest that by working backwards—examining the strategy in order to determine the intended reader—we may arrive at more relevant insights into Hyder’s intended reader. Tymoczko claims that

in post-colonial writing the amount of cultural material that is explained explicitly serves as a kind of index of the intended audience and of the cultural gradient between the writer/ subject and the audience, with greater amounts of explicit material indicating that text is aimed at the former colonizers and/or a dominant international audience. (28)

By looking at three of the most significant changes between *Aag ka Darya* and *River of Fire*, focusing specifically on the cultural material contained within them and its treatment, I hope to present a different perspective on Hyder's self-translation.

Cultural Plurality

The differences between *Aag ka Darya* and *River of Fire* are apparent even before the first line. The English text is preceded by a table of contents, listing seventy-three chapters. The progression of chapter titles reads almost as a parody of the evolution of World Literature: the early cycle of titles are suitably exotic—"The Time of the Peacocks", "Aryani, Goddess of the Woods;" to the Kiplingesque—"The Abominable Customs of the Gentoos and Mussalmans;" the earnestly political—"Inquilab, Zindabad!" (Long live the revolution); the ironically postcolonial—"Stateless;" and finally full circle to "The Highway to Shravasti." In her study of the concept of time in Hyder's novel, Sukrita Kumar adds a curious endnote:

River of Fire is specially organized in chapters with titles, not given in the Hindi [authorized translation] and Urdu texts, an attempt to perhaps simplify for the English mind the complex metaphor of cultural plurality evolved over centuries. (94)

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to conjecture on Kumar's understanding of the "English mind," or even her inability to see the playfulness inherent in Hyder's choice of titles; suffice it to say that she clearly believes *River of Fire* is intended for a foreign readership, one that requires some hand-holding. Meenakshi Mukherjee, in her study of

the linguistic diversity of India, adds that “Indian writers in English have for a long time been engaged—though not always self-consciously—in the construction of a clearly defined and recognizable India (75).” It is not inconceivable, I believe, that Hyder is poking fun at the Indian writer in English (the ones that get published in the West and suitably impress the Western reader with their depictions of an India that already exists in the Western imagination), for she makes no attempt at “clearly defining” any aspect of her India. The fifth word of *River of Fire* is “beerbahuti” (red velvet mite), which Hyder leaves untranslated and even un-italicized. There is, however, an intriguing exception worth exploring.

The “heart” of *River of Fire* is in the Oudh chapters, one third into the novel and part of the third episode. The titles of these chapters are less ironically intended: “A Faery Tale Kingdom,” “Farewell to Camelot,” “The Waterway of Tears,” and “The Queen and her Knights.” Masood Ashraf Raja offers an insightful analysis of these chapters. He claims that Hyder makes a conscious decision to locate her third movement in the princely state of Oudh rather than Delhi, both relics of the Mughal empire and given a certain, short-lived, autonomy by the British. He explains that the culture of Lucknow, the capital city of Oudh, was far more syncretic than that of Delhi—Shia customs and Hindu traditions blended to create a court steeped in literary and social refinement. Lucknow was truly representative of the *ganga-jamuni* ² aspect of Indian culture so dear to Hyder and Unlike in the rest of the novel, where Hyder takes the reader’s understanding of a wide range of multicultural references for granted, here she takes great

² The expression combines the names of the Ganges and Jamuna rivers and is used to describe the composite nature of India, a fusion of Hindu and Muslim elements.

pains to elucidate the history and customs of the Oudh. For whom does she translate an Urdu lullaby? Who needs to be taught the lineage of the rulers of Oudh? Tymoczko writes that

It is telling that translators moving from a dominant-culture source text to a minority-culture audience often leave dominant cultural materials implicit, presupposing knowledge of the mythic allusions, historic events, etc.... (34)

Would it then follow that a detailed explanation of historic events, religious celebrations and the like suggests that Hyder is translating a minority-culture source text for a dominant-culture audience, that she is indeed translating for the English-speaking Western reader?

A closer reading of the corresponding chapters in both texts does not seem to support such a possibility. Yes, Chapter 22, “A Faery Tale Kingdom” does include a detailed, though fast-paced, historical summary of the kings of Oudh, which is not to be found in Section 30 in *Aag ka Darya*, yet both texts include long, elegiac sections depicting the culture of Lucknow. According to Kumar, Hyder was prompted to write *Aag ka Darya* by her niece’s question: “What is *Basant*? (88)” *Basant*, technically a Hindu celebration of the advent of Spring, had always been jointly commemorated by all communities in pre-Partition India. The poignant realization that the syncretic culture of India was already lost within a single generation of the creation of two separate states, compelled Hyder to write her novel. The long cultural descriptions in *Aag ka Darya* are necessary for a generation of people born in Pakistan, a nation committed to the creation of a non-Indian identity. Who are they intended for in *River of Fire*? By the time Hyder writes the English version, she is back in India, although the India she identifies with,

Nehru's India, is threatened by the rise of Hindu nationalism. It is this generation of Indians that need reminding of India's syncretic past, of a time when the Muslim Nawab of Lucknow's mother "built the famous Hanuman temple in Ali Gunj, Lucknow, with a crescent atop its spire (131)." In both texts Hyder's intended audience remains subcontinental.

The Urdu Epigraph

There is no table of contents at the beginning of *Aag ka Darya*. Even the beerbahuti is elusive. "I don't know much about gods, but I do understand that the river is a powerful and muddy river," reads the very first line of *Aag ka Darya* (my translation). If this line seems familiar it is because it is the opening line of T.S. Eliot's third quartet, "The Dry Salvages." The original is, of course, "I do not know much about gods; but I think that the river is a strong brown god." Hyder uses her own translation of "The Dry Salvages" as an epigraph to *Aag ka Darya*. It is telling, in the context of a cultural north-south divide, that she has to translate it herself, no other Urdu translation of the *Four Quartets* exists to this day. In many ways, Hyder could not have come upon a better epigraph for her novel—*Four Quartets* in their entirety, and "The Dry Salvages" in particular, encapsulate the theme of time, so central to *Aag ka Darya*. Before addressing the issue of why Hyder chose to exclude any mention of "The Dry Salvages" in her English version, it is necessary to consider why she chose to use it so thoroughly and effectively in *Aag ka Darya*.

There is a certain structural symmetry between *Four Quartets* and *Aag ka Darya* which bears highlighting. The *Four Quartets* are obviously a single collection of four poems, just as a quartet is a single piece performed by four separate instruments.

According to Moody “the formal structure is designed to allow the instruments to remain distinct from each other while yet performing together, and so to treat different themes in different ways while weaving them into ‘a new whole’ (143),” which is precisely what Eliot and Hyder are doing with their writings. Each creates a series of four discrete moments, separated by time and space, that, seen together, reveal patterns of circularity and interconnectedness. Moody identifies four modes, or voices, in Eliot’s quartets: impersonal thought, personal voice, prayer or exhortation, and finally a coming together of the previous three in a new voice of unison. There are echoes of this structure in *Aag ka Darya/ River of Fire*; Hyder focuses on four key characters Gautam, Kamal, Champa and Cyril, who each, in their assorted avatars, exercise varying degrees of presence through the first three episodes and then are all assembled equally in the fourth episode. Moody notes that “in the later quartets the voices are more developed, and the structures more complex (145);” similarly, in Hyder’s work *Sangari* finds that “in each story the characters become more complex as they are inflected by their previous persona (25).”

There are other similarities between Eliot and Hyder that go beyond correspondent structures of text. Eliot is, in Rushdiean terms, a ‘translated man;’ born on the shores of the Mississippi river in St. Louis, Eliot moves permanently to England as a young man. Alan Marshall suggests that Eliot’s development as a poet can be seen through his changing relationship to England; Eliot was drawn to the idea of Empire inherent in England. Marshall writes:

Order is a recurrent term in Eliot's writing, and taking our bearings from his essay on Dante (1929), we can say that it signals movement away from a private language towards the ideal of a common one. Eliot's critique of English poetry, from Shakespeare down, is based on the absence of what he believed had been brought to perfection by Dante: a common language.

A common language is an *imperial* phenomenon, and expresses the *universality* of the idea which informs it. (102)

Eliot's admiration for empire must have accorded with Hyder's vision of India, not as a nation, certainly not as a colony, but as a civilization that transcended modern concepts of nation-state and therefore endured beyond the conflicts engendered by their creation. Eliot published the first of the quartets, "Burnt Norton" in 1936, but the remaining three poems were published between 1940 and 1942. It is tempting to read the works of both writers as an attempt to contextualize catastrophic events like the Second World War or Partition within a greater narrative.

In his analysis of *Four Quartets*, Roger Bellin finds that "the text integrates paraphrases, near-quotations and direct citations from disparate times and cultures (422)." Hyder too plays with a similar layering of texts and allusions; Eliot's inclusion of Krishna as yet another witness to the ravages caused by the river of time and the necessity, even inevitability, to "fare forward" must have resonated deeply with Hyder. The very title of her novel, *Aag ka Darya*, derives from a poem by Urdu poet Jigar:

*Yeh ishq nahin aasan
Itna to samajh lije
Ek aag ka darya hai
Aur doob ke jana hai.*

Kumar translates it as follows:

This love is not easy
Do understand this much
This is a river of fire
And you must drown in it, to go ahead (88).

However, the last line of the verse could just as easily (and perhaps more correctly in terms of syntax) be translated to read "Drown and fare forward." Hyder must have read "The Dry Salvages" in line with Melaney's analysis, who claims it "employs language

very differently [in comparison to its ‘twin quartet’ “East Coker”] in its invocation of river and sea as symbols of continuity and civilizational awareness (156).” Indeed, within this language she finds not just an epigraph but a structural device. As mentioned earlier, *Aag ka Darya*, unlike *River of Fire*, does not name its chapters, and “The Dry Salvages” serves neatly as sort of table of contents—laying out the tone and the themes of what is to follow. Why then, does she drop it in her English version?

When asked directly by Kumkum Sangari why she had excised the epigraph from *River of Fire*, Hyder responds by saying “*chut gaya hoga*” (it may have got left out). M. Asaduddin suggests that Hyder left out the epigraph when faced with the dilemma of quoting Eliot in his original English, or retranslating her own translation. This certainly may have played a role in her decision. Hyder’s translation, although remarkably faithful to the verses she does choose to translate, is truncated and self-serving—gone are all of Eliot’s theological musings and references to his own childhood. If Eliot’s metaphoric river meanders down to a hopeful conclusion that thought and action can combine to overcome the bonds of the past and future, Hyder’s *aag ka darya* hurtles and stops abruptly when Krishna effectively tells Arjuna he must drown to cross. Hyder’s translation of “The Dry Salvages” offers clues to her tendencies as a translator in general: her natural instinct is to shorten and sharpen her focus on the elements that are important to her narrative. Bassnett and Triverdi have looked at the interesting phenomenon of translating translations, specifically with regards to Hindi translations in the 1920s and 30s of Khayyam’s *Rubaiyat*, not from the original Persian, but from Fitzgerald’s creative English translations and find that there was a

wholesale appropriation of the *Rubaiyat* to the local culture and even topical nationalist context. Thus, if the Persian poets such as Khayyam and

Attar needed to be supplied with ‘a little Art’ by Fitzgerald before they could become acceptable in English, Fitzgerald in turn needed to be fairly comprehensively modified and even subverted before he could be metamorphosed into successful Hindi poetry. (8)

By deleting references to Eliot’s childhood—the nursery bedroom, the rank ailanthus, the horseshoe crabs and lobsterpots, the dead negroes (Hyder never even mentions the title of the poem hence ignoring a geographical reference obviously significant to Eliot) —and all allusions to the deeply-felt Christianity of his poem, Hyder is, in effect, domesticating his text to better suit her Indian reader, and therefore, in the context of translation theory, valorizing Indian civilization over Western culture. Removing Eliot’s presence entirely in *River of Fire*, if the translation were meant for a global audience, is then consistent—a sort of refusal to allow the Western reader to find the familiar in her world.

I contend, however, that Hyder’s motivations, both for relying on Eliot to mediate *Aag ka Darya*, and removing his presence from *River of Fire*, lie beyond what Bassnett and Triverdi refer to as “the Empire translates back (8).” In aligning *Aag ka Darya* with Eliot, Hyder is making two important points: by linking her work to an English poet she is laying claim to the English language and English literature as an integral part of her own cultural heritage, and by coupling her work with that of Eliot she is positioning herself as a modernist. This second point requires some elaboration—the history of Urdu literature is almost exclusively a history of poetry. Frances Pritchett points out that Urdu’s literary origins lie in the form of the *tazkira* or anthology of poetry. The oral tradition of the *dastan* or the epic romance became a written genre in the late 19th century, but as Pritchett notes the *dastan* remains a largely overlooked genre, denigrated for its lack of historical sense (904). The first Urdu prose to be taken seriously is the short stories written by members of the Progressive Writers Association. The Association

was founded in the late 1930s in Lucknow and from its inception, heavily influenced by Marxism, it was anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist. The Association attracted many young Urdu writers, Hyder's contemporaries like Munshi Premchand, Dr. Mulk Raj Anand, Ismet Chughtai and Saadat Hasan Manto, who all saw themselves as part of a universal struggle for freedom and equality. The fact that Hyder's chosen themes were more attuned to a holistic vision of India, and that her characters were more representative of her own milieu was remarked upon by these writers. Ismet Chughtai titled her essay critiquing Hyder's early work "Pompom Darling" and admonished her to look beyond a world of "drawing rooms" and "Persian carpets." Lacking the support of the Progressive Writers Association, Hyder may have felt that referencing Eliot lent a certain cachet to her work with respect to her peers and her original readers.

There can be no doubt that the intended audience for *Aag ka Darya* was subcontinental. If Eliot no longer features in *River of Fire* it is not because Hyder has a different audience in mind for her (re)creation, but because she wants to move push at boundaries—linguistic, literary and cultural. Far from accommodating a foreign/ Western reader, *River of Fire* sheds much of the literary and cultural references familiar to such a reader and, in fact, embraces a greater amount of Urdu poetry and moves away from the modern novel to a form more akin to the *dastan*. In the last poem of the *Four Quartets* Eliot writes "What we call the beginning is often the end, And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from." *River of Fire* is precisely the 'end' that was present in *Aag ka Darya*'s epigraph, and the beginning of a new end.

Partition

The end of British India is the beginning of two new nations: India and Pakistan. It is tempting to see the creation of these two countries, Hindu Hindi-speaking India and Muslim Urdu-speaking Pakistan as the end of the syncretic and absorptive Indian civilization idealized by Hyder. I believe that Hyder's translation of her work, the writing of *River of Fire*, is in fact repudiation of this facile and erroneous interpretation. Nikhat Taj finds that "the novel ends 'scarred'—the commonality of culture that had fused the Indians (Hindus and Muslims) together lay assundered—culturally dislocated, with only memories and questions doing the rounds (208)." Taj's choice of the word 'dislocated' is perhaps closer to an understanding of Hyder's work than her made-up construction 'assundered'. Eliot's *Quartets* are an apt epigraph for *Aag ka Darya* because they capture temporal as well as spatial flow and discontinuity, which are both central to Hyder's work; they also help her mediate the event of Partition in *Aag ka Darya*, still vivid in her mind. Forty years later, Eliot's presence is invisible in *River of Fire*. Hyder's treatment of this event in both novels invites further scrutiny.

The actual moment of Partition is never discussed by the characters in *Aag ka Darya*; section 58 (in the Urdu the 'chapters' are merely numbered not named) simply reads "Hindustan 1947 (285)." There is no further text. Section 59 starts off with Cyril checking the time, while pacing below the clock at Piccadilly tube station. It is as though Hyder is unable to find words to describe the event. In terms of her readership, no further elaboration is required for any person hailing from the Indian subcontinent, forever 'midnight's children.' Hyder does, however, insert an interesting prelude to Partition. Section 57 tells the tale of Arjuna; he has arrived at the scene of the battle and instructs

his charioteer, Krishna, to bring him between the two armies. There he witnesses families divided—brother against brother, father against son—standing ready to kill one another.

Arjuna tells Krishna he cannot fight:

My hands and feet are soaked. My throat is dry. My body shivers. The hair on my head stands up. My bow is slipping from my hands. I am burning up. O Krishna! I can't stand straight. My mind is reeling. I see evil omens. (284 my translation)

Hyder's recreation of Arjuna's conversation with Krishna is reminiscent of the traditional Shiite *marsiya*—the plaintive retelling of the battle of Karbala—intended to work up to an agonizing climax, followed by catharsis in the tears of the listener. Arjuna tells Krishna that the destruction of the tribe will bring ancient traditions to an end, and that he will not fight as he doesn't know who is in the right, him or his enemies. At face value, the inclusion of Arjuna's speech seems to confirm Taj's reading of a "scarred" ending, a culture "assundered", but by linking the moment of Partition with the battle of Karbala and the even older battle from the Bhagavad Gita, Hyder is showing that internecine warfare is just another pattern in the long history of humanity, repeating through time and space.

She is also, of course, linking this moment to her epigraph. Hyder's intricate layering of translation, of words and cultures, merits a few words of explanation. By referring to Krishna in "The Dry Salvages" Eliot links the anguish of the Second World War, of neighbor fighting neighbor, with that of Arjuna's. Eliot never expands on the reference: in the poem Krishna merely admonishes Arjuna and urges him to "fare forward." Does Eliot assume that his reader would be familiar enough with ancient Hindu scripture to understand the reference? The question is irrelevant; what is important is that

the Hindu god Krishna becomes part of Eliot's universe and, therefore, is 'translated' into the Western literary canon. By bringing Krishna back to more familiar shores in *Aag ka Darya*, Hyder is simultaneously claiming her right to the Western literary canon and reclaiming her Indian heritage—not just retranslating Arjuna to his original Sanskrit, but now speaking Urdu, melding Hindu and Muslim iconography. Eliot asks, "Where is there an end of it?" And just like Eliot, Hyder finds that "There is no end, but addition." Contrary to Taj's reading, the novel does not "end 'scarred'"; there is indeed a 'dislocation' which warrants a bearing across, a translation.

By the time Hyder writes *River of Fire*, she has found the words to express Partition's effects. The words are not hers. She no longer quotes Eliot, but another poet, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, although she translates him just as she translated Eliot. Mufti claims that "Faiz is widely regarded as the most significant Urdu poet of the postcolonial period (245)." Although a member of the Progressive Writers Association, Mufti argues that his poetry is more a lyrical exploration of the self than a political statement. Given Faiz's clear Marxist leanings, Mufti finds it interesting that his poetry incites a sense of elation akin to religious experience. It is Faiz's Urdu poem "*Subh-e-azadi*", or "Freedom's Dawn", written in August 1947, in the direct aftermath of Partition that Hyder coopts in *River of Fire*. The end of Chapter 45 finds many of the main characters grouped together in the days following Partition, still in India, "discussing life's new, expanding horizons." Many of them are leaving, some to Karachi, others to London, Paris and New York. They are apparently discussing technological progress:

"They already have television in London."
"And Gautam is going all the way to America by air," another friend commented. Talat interrupted him as a grim reminder: "Have you read

Faiz Ahmed Faiz's latest poem. *The Morning of Freedom? Yeh daag daag ujala, yeh shab-gazida sahar...*" She went on to recite the poem. The audience became very still. (275)

Another friend, Indian as well, but Malyali speaking, asks for a translation into "pidgin English" as he does not understand Faiz's elevated Urdu. Hyder provides her own translation, despite the poem having been translated into English in 1971 by Faiz's official translator and long-time friend, Victor Kiernan. Just as she did with her translation of "The Dry Salvages," Hyder abridges and manipulates the text to serve her own purposes. Compare Kiernan's translation of the last few verses:

Night's heaviness is unlesened still, the hour
Of mind and spirit's ransom has not struck;
Let us go on, our goal is not reached yet (127)

with Hyder's "the night's burden has not diminished, the hour of deliverance for eye and heart has not arrived. Face forward! For our destination is not yet in sight (275)." Hyder's translation is certainly more fluent, and certainly less poetic, but I believe the variances serve a different purpose than greater fluency. Three specific word choices demand a closer look: she switches "deliverance" for "ransom," "destination" for "goal" and "face forward" for "let us go on." Firstly, all three swaps introduce the element of location and, secondly, all three changes serve to underscore similarities between Faiz's poem and Eliot's.

But why would Hyder substitute an Urdu poet for Eliot in her English translation if they both appear to serve the same purpose? If Hyder's objective were to reach a different, more international audience with *River of Fire*, then, given the trends in World Literature at the time, it would indeed be more powerful to appropriate the voice of renowned local poet. By removing Eliot in favor of Faiz, Hyder would certainly silence

the critics within the Progressive Writers Association who thought of her as an Anglicized elitist. I contend a closer reading of *River of Fire* demonstrates that far from shedding Eliot, Hyder is *adding* to him. Chapter 45 is titled “The Broken Tanpura of Sultan Hussain Shah Nayak of Jaunpur,” introducing Urdu words and cultural references in the English text that didn’t exist in the Urdu, as well as recalling the circulatory nature of time as the title immediately links to Chapter 12, “Hussain Shah Nayak.” In fact, the whole chapter is densely packed with references ranging from Raga Malhar (a monsoon raag), to Colonel Blimp’s “*thora cha, ekdum, jaldi, bandobast*” (gentle mockery of the colonial officer), to Beethoven and the Second World War (reminder of Eliot’s presence), to Begum Aizaz Rasooi (identified as a flamboyant leader, wife of a taluqdar in a footnote), that would elude the casual Western reader for the most part. Hyder eschews any translation or explanation, other than the footnote, which is of course also untranslated.

Chapter 45 offers another key to Hyder’s intended reader for *River of Fire*: twice within the chapter a character makes reference to the end of “Act One”, offering a clue to the inherent dynamic between the two versions of the novel. In examining the organizational principles of *River of Fire*, Taj finds that “the move of one historic segment into another (...) is neatly dovetailed (199).” She notes that the first episode segues into the second without any interruption—in one sentence Gautam Nilambar is submerged into the angry waves of the river Saryu and the next finds Kamaluddin observing the same river from his horse. Two millennia separate these episodes; the view remains the same, the eyes change. The change of one letter between Eliot’s “Fare forward” and Faiz’s “Face forward” is a similar transition. *River of Fire* is not *Aag ka*

Darya translated from one language to another, but from one time to another; Faiz is Eliot translated, their respective poems yet another iteration of the same story. The reader remains the same, merely borne across time and space.

The first chapter of this thesis demonstrated that by translating her work from Urdu to English, Hyder engages in a process of bearing across, not words, but meaning and symbol; by creating two texts she creates a “third space” which allows her to explore questions of identity. This chapter attempts to show that despite superficial signs to the contrary, Hyder is not particularly interested in enlarging the reach of text; she is more interested in adding greater depth—another dimension—to her work. According to Cronin, the idea of an “independent original” put forth by Venuti, and his single-minded focus on ‘source’ and ‘target’ texts is outmoded. He claims that “ultimately it is translation that provides evidence of cultural interdependency (Attolino et al, 8).” Cronin suggests that the globalization of English as a means of communication ushers in a cosmopolitanism that “although antithetical to nationalism (...) does not necessarily imply the decline of an ethnocentric definition of identity (9).” With this view in mind, it is perhaps more useful to read *River of Fire* as the fifth movement of *Aag ka Darya*; there is no vertical translation of text from a minority language to a dominant language, there is, instead, a horizontal expansion of text more reflective, not just of India’s expansive nature, but of Hyder’s own multicultural identity.

IV:

Self-Translation: Resolving a Fractured Identity or Reaffirming a Composite Self?

The scant scholarship that existed on self-translation until the last decade tended to rely on questions of authority and vocation—the writer doesn't trust another to translate his text, he feels compelled to translate himself to ensure a translation faithful to the original. Such a view is compounded by Nabokov's opinions on the matter; in an interview he gave to *Playboy* magazine in 1964 he is quoted as saying:

I imagined that in some distant future somebody might produce a Russian version of *Lolita*. I trained my inner telescope upon that particular point in the distant future and I saw that every paragraph, pockmarked as it is with pitfalls, could lend itself to hideous mistranslation. In the hands of a harmful drudge, the Russian version of *Lolita* would be entirely degraded and botched by vulgar paraphrases or blunders. So I decided to translate it myself.

At the time of the interview, Nabokov had translated sixty pages. Over the length of his career he would go on to become a prolific self-translator; in the introduction to her book on self-translation Sara Kippur quotes his “vivid metaphor” that the process is “a terrible thing, translating oneself, sorting through one's own innards, then trying them on for size like a pair of gloves (20).” Nabokov's two statements echo the evolution of self-translation within translation studies: the self-translator goes from being the best translator of his text, to being engaged in a struggle similar to the original act of creation. Kippur also mentions Samuel Beckett, possibly the greatest self-translator of them all, in some detail; she writes “the fact that Beckett persisted in self-translation, despite noting the difficulty of doing so, suggests that its literary function exceeds authorial pleasure (21).”

Increasingly, the attention of translation studies, with regard to self-translation, has focused on micro-level concerns, rather than the macro-level ‘cultural turn’ pioneered by Lefevere, Bassnett and Venuti. Just as the discipline has moved beyond the idea of an original and a secondary, derivative text, so too has the idea of the translator as mediator between dominant and minority cultures. That is not to say that a cultural/ linguistic hierarchy doesn’t persist, but there is a growing realization that every self-translator’s work is motivated by reasons that are far more personal and more individual than previously allowed. So far, I have argued that if there is any linguistic power struggle inherent in Hyder’s work, it is more between Hindi and Urdu, rather than English and Urdu, and that her translation strategies are ambiguous, not able to be neatly termed “domesticating” or “foreignizing.” In this chapter, I will further build on that argument to show that *Aag ka Darya* and *River of Fire* must be read together, as part of an oeuvre deeply committed to Hyder’s narrative of a composite India and her assertion of her right to a similarly composite identity. The first half of this chapter will analyze Hyder’s work in the light of recent scholarship on self-translation, specifically with regards to exile and language in the case of writers such as Beckett and Nabokov. The second half will examine whether Hyder’s “transcreation” can, in effect, be considered an interlingual translation at all, or whether it is preemptive of the already-translated texts created by Rushdie, for instance.

Exile or Emancipation

Ioanna Chatzidimitriou finds that “like Beckett and Nabokov, contemporary translingual authors adopt a new language, often following geographical displacement (...) that led to deliberate exile (22).” In her book, *Translating Oneself: Language and*

Selfhood in Cross-Cultural Autobiography, Mary Besemeres has collected the experiences of many contemporary self-translators, and while each of their experiences is unique, there are some areas of similarity: she uses the words “bivalent, bilingual consciousness,” while describing the novels of Nabokov and Kazuo Ishiguro; she notes Eva Hoffman’s understanding of the ‘self’ as “the struggling agent as well as the intractable object of the translation;” she refers to G. H. Mead’s “the act of articulating in English what was first observed in another language, and to the act of observing oneself do so (12).” In all these cases there is a clear theme of duality—either a split ‘self’ or a twinned ‘self,’ almost implying that a spatial dislocation results in a multiplication of personal consciousness. She notes the accounts of many writers, who, in moving away from the sphere of their ‘natural’ language, and, acquiring a new language and its inherent culture, experience what she terms “bilingual schizophrenia.” She claims that the relationship between language and ‘self’ is twofold: the native language is the first mediator of the world around, in a sense “it corresponds by right to reality (18);” at the same time, the ‘self’ is shaped by the cultural values inherent in that language. By moving away from one language to another, there is a loss of concepts, which now must be replaced by another set, causing a disorientation, even a feeling of alienation from oneself. The writer senses a certain ‘mimicry’ within himself, a form of inauthenticity.

G. N. Dutt, Gautam in Hyder’s third episode, is an interesting character to examine within the context of Besemere’s findings; although he is neither an immigrant nor an exile, he too experiences the interdependency of language and mobility: a Bengali Brahmin he has embraced the English language and culture completely. He comes to serve Cyril Ashley, the soon-to-be Resident at Lucknow. Cyril, who previously hoped to

translate Dara Shikoh's Persian translation of the *Upanishads* into English, and who lives with a local woman as his *bibi*, takes a liking to Gautam, even though he sees him for what he is: "like all good baboos this one was also fond of speaking pompously correct English (127)." Gautam revels in his identification with English—he often thinks to himself in English, "the language that gave him great clarity of thought." When he arrives in Lucknow, and into the courtesan Champa's salon, he is completely disoriented. Baffled by the old formal traditions, and the extravagant language, of the old court of Oudh, he slowly softens to its charms, entranced by Champa, (who is in some sense the personification of the old ways of Oudh, "The Faery Tale Kingdom"), he confesses to her "I was merely a fake Englishman (142)." But the moment passes, and Gautam returns to Bengal. Champa and Lucknow forgotten, he "acquires a place in the sun," climbing up the echelons of British India. Late in life, he learns of Champa's (read Lucknow's) sad end and has a rare moment of introspection; he turns to his volume of Toru Dutt's poems (a young Bengali poet, who wrote in English and French):

O echo whose repose I mar
 With my regrets and mournful cries
 He comes...I hear his voice afar,
 Or is it thine that thus replied?
 Peace! hark he calls! —in vain, in vain.
 The loved and lost, comes not again. (175)

Can this mourning for a lost love be expanded to include a mourning for the loss of a potential 'self'? Is Gautam conscious of the loss of an 'Indian' life that could have been his, instead of this life as a "fake Englishman?" By choosing to live his life in a language other than his 'natural' language, has he led an inauthentic life? Besemeres quotes Tzvetan Todorov, a Bulgarian writer who moved to France: "my twin affiliation produces

but one effect: in my own eyes it renders inauthentic each of my two modes of discourse since each can correspond to but half my being (32).”

It is possible to read *Aag ka Darya* and *River of Fire* within this dialectic of two halves of a divided self. “The problem of fragmentation, discontinuity and tension is particularly important in understanding the experience of someone who is fighting with the sense of losing the ground for their self,” writes Aurelia Klimkiewicz (Cordingley, 191).” Looking at the works of Nabokov, Kundera and Nancy Huston, she finds that the act of self-translation is a process of healing trauma caused by exile and the loss of ‘home’. “Self-translation—because it implies the existence of another version of the text—works finally as an anchor (194),” she writes. This view of self-translation as a healing process is certainly not upheld throughout the translation studies community. Cordingley refers to the “teleological reading of translation as the quest to attain oneness with the original and its author (3),” and suggests that while, in theory, self-translation may be its ideal manifestation, in reality the individual experiences of self-translators do not support such a conclusion. In their first ever comprehensive history of self-translation, Hokenson and Munson write, “to survey the theoretical models is to be haunted by Schleiermacher’s dictum that the bilingual writer goes about doubled like a ghost, hanging in the unpleasant middle space of languages and literatures (165).” In the post-colonial context, this “unpleasant middle space” is also the locus of the traitor.

The shadow of betrayal certainly lurks behind any reading of *River of Fire*: Hyder chooses to write in the language of her colonizer, and after having left the land of her birth for a nation purportedly created for her, she returns to a country where her loyalties are always suspect. There is no doubt that Hyder is keenly aware of being between and

betwixt: Kamal, who, “had decided that he would not just forsake his country (374),” and had chosen to remain in India, finds himself on a train to Pakistan, when his family’s properties in India are confiscated. Later, he returns to India, the land that was his so recently, to finalize his affairs. When a railway official approaches him for his ticket, he suffers a moment of panic, feeling like a foreigner, like the enemy: “The wheels of the train also seemed to be repeating the same clangorous, harrowing, blood-curdling refrain—spy—traitor—spy—traitor—traitor—(396).” On his return to Pakistan, he cannot help his tears as he realizes he is now a “refugee...displaced...homeless (419).” Hyder here repeats the earlier train ride almost word for word: he feels the eyes of the other passengers on him, and hears the wheels’ refrain: “traitor, spy, traitor, spy...” Sinead Mooney in her book on Beckett writes of his “recognition of translation’s systematic and inevitable infidelity(4).” However, she finds, once reconciled to the inevitability of betrayal, Beckett sees its utility:

The chasm between word and world is a matter of inherent expressive failure of language, but Beckett’s work, by seizing on writing in a foreign language, constitutes an idiosyncratic attempt to speak the limits of a language as a paradoxical opportunity for writing. His bilingualism allows him to generate novel responses to the threat of an unsayable void. (4)

I believe it is possible to see Hyder’s translation into English, with its inherent quality of betrayal, as the creation of an opportunity, a ‘third space’ if you will, to respond to, and move beyond, the ‘unsayable void’ of the loss of country and culture.

It is important to conceptualize *River of Fire* not just as a translation from one space (linguistic or cultural) to another, but also as a translation through time. As mentioned previously, the author of *Aag ka Darya* was a young, highly Anglicized woman, recently wrenched from her home (physical and spiritual); this is the writer who

requires Eliot's mediation to organize her narrative, the writer who can find no words to express her emotions at Partition. The author of *River of Fire* has evolved—translated through space and time—she is back at the beginning of the cycle, but just like the ever-repeating characters of the episodes that make up her novel, she too is more complex. With this idea of revision in mind, with both its implied meanings of seeing again and correcting, there is one particular passage in *River of Fire* that bears closer inspection. The moment is after Partition, when most of the characters find themselves in England—momentarily suspended in a space neither in Pakistan, nor India, the 'third space'—gathered at the annual conference of Indian Students Union of Great Britain. They are addressed by the renowned Professor Hyman Levy, a "friend of India," who takes this moment to apologize for colonialism. "I am ashamed of the way my country treated you for two hundred years," he says (295). So far, the scene is treated identically in the Urdu and English texts. However, while the Urdu text offers no further descriptive of Professor Hyman, other than his erudition and his fondness for India, the English text does something quite different. In *River of Fire*, Roshan, a Pakistani in the crowd of Indians, passes a note to her friends: "Point for reflection—Britain is his country, Israel is his country, too..." In the English, Hyder highlights Hyman's Jewishness—the dual-national forever in exile, the eternal 'other'—drawing attention in her translation to this "unpleasant middle space," and yet one that allows her to expand her narrative.

What follows directly after this exchange offers further insight into Hyder's manipulation of her translation; Talat, who Hyder notes, was quite unpredictable, suddenly gets up and loudly delivers the chorus' lines from Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*. In the Urdu, Talat quotes a few lines from the same passage (translated by

Hyder) but very earnestly; here Hyder writes Talat “stood up and declaimed as though she was on the stage of the Old Vic,” lending a certain flippancy to the moment, as though Hyder was now distancing herself from Eliot. As previously noted, Hyder had already excised her translation of “The Dry Salvages” from *River of Fire* and had substituted the work of an ‘authentic’ Urdu poet for yet another reference to Eliot. The ironic use of Eliot’s words (now restored to their original English) can be read as an attempt to tone down her Anglicization, as well as show her personal growth. By retaining the lines from Eliot, Hyder achieves an interesting intertextuality: firstly, there is a clear link between *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Four Quartets*, bringing to mind the verse from “The Dry Salvages,” “You are not the same people who left the station,” and secondly, by choosing to quote lines from the chorus, Hyder is underlining the inner/outer duality that is central, not just to her narrative, but to her need to translate.

In her paper on the role of the chorus in Eliot’s play *Murder in the Cathedral*, Carole Beckett finds that because the chorus is made up of ordinary women, neither good nor evil, the spectators of the play identify with them, and because the chorus too are, in fact, just witnesses they effectively become spectators. She says that this “internal/external participation has an interesting parallel in the internal conflict of Part I and the external conflict of Part II (71).” *Aag ka Darya* and *River of Fire* are both epics of external and internal conflicts—India through the ages is often at war, its boundaries changing with the ebb and flow of various conquests; the lives of the people who make up this India are also in a state of internal struggle, often impacted by the external conflicts facing the country, conflicts in which they participate, willingly or unwillingly. Carole Beckett notes that “this is one of the paradoxes of the role of the Chorus: they

must participate in the action and suffering of Thomas in order that action and suffering might be transcended (72).” Just like the women who make up the chorus, the characters of Hyder’s novels are neither sinners nor knights—they are travelers. Beckett finds that *Murder in the Cathedral* must be read as a “drama of salvation,” and ultimately the role of the chorus is to “demonstrate their journey (...) towards salvation (73).” Loredana Polezzi has eloquently examined the connection between travel and translation in the light of semiotician Paolo Fabbri’s portrayal of “translator-as-apostate”:

This is someone who has moved between cultures and languages, and discovered that their incommensurability is a protective myth, an injunction designed to support the identity of competing groups (be these national, religious, or of any other type). Apostates, travelers, translators, must be prepared to transgress that injunction in order to allow communication and transformation to take place (...) they must be prepared to translate *and* to become translated. (185)

By embracing her perpetual exile, her belonging neither here nor there, Hyder is free to create a narrative of the universality of the human experience, of the inevitable forward and circular motion of time.

Post-colonial, Post-Partition, Post-Translation

Rushdie starts off his essay “Imaginary Homelands,” by quoting Hartley’s well-known line, “the past is a foreign country.” Both Hyder and Rushdie, who have made literary careers of mining the past, would certainly not consider it ‘foreign’; “it’s my present that is foreign, and that past is home, albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of lost time,” writes Rushdie (9). Comparing another novel of Hyder’s, *My Temples, Too* to Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, Rajeswari Rajan writes of the biographical similarities between the two writers—they both come from well-heeled and intellectual Urdu-

speaking Muslim families; they both left India for Pakistan, only to move again. Rajan makes note of their “identical commitment to nationalist ideals of secularism, cosmopolitanism and syncretism (37);” and while their commitment to nationalism of any sort is surely debatable (and in Hyder’s case particularly risible), there can be no doubt that they are wedded to an expansive India, which may or may not be lost, “imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind (10).” They both also retain a keen recognition of what has been lost. Rushdie writes: “I suggest that the writer who is out-of-country and even out-of-language may experience this loss in an intensified form (12).” Rushdie’s turn of phrase “out-of-language,” is intriguing—it captures not just the fact that the writer now operates in *a* different language, but that the experience may be beyond *all* language, similar, perhaps akin to an out-of-body experience.

Unlike Hyder, Rushdie, of course, writes in English, yet it is fair to consider his work within the context of translation. Jenni Ramone, who has investigated the idea of translation inherent in Rushdie’s work in some detail, offers a useful definition of translation from Lefevere, a translation, according to him is:

to represent a foreign text in one’s own culture; where the foreign may be of course, the foreign language, but also the ‘foreign’ as something made distant or unfamiliar by historical, political, cultural or other differences.
(123)

Rushdie himself makes note of this idea of distance; “it may be that when the Indian writer who writes from outside India tries to reflect that world, he is obliged to deal in broken mirrors,” he writes (11). Rushdie embraces this fragmented medium of translating ‘his India.’ To him, the distortion created by the fragmentation is what is “gained in translation.” It is possible to look at Hyder’s translation in a similar vein—the text, fragmented in two languages offers something that is larger than the sum of its parts.

Previously, in his forward to *Extraterritorial*, Steiner has previously highlighted the new focus on language as central to literature:

To focus on the linguistic elements in Nabokov or Beckett, on the inter- and intra-linguistic cat's cradle of their inventions, is an obvious move. But it points to the more general theme of the effects of the language revolution on the ways in which we read literature. (vii)

Translation, far from being derivative, or secondary, now becomes the objective. Ramone writes that “Rushdie’s engagement with translation practices and theories ultimately points towards a desire to make translation a visible and a free practice (15).” By refusing to be invisible translators, Rushdie and Hyder are inserting themselves into their texts.

While not strictly ‘translated’ in an interlingual sense, Rushdie’s English text is an internally translated text, or even better, to borrow from the French expression, an auto-translated text. Many of Rushdie’s characters, although fictive beings, carry elements of autobiography. Paschalis Nikolaou has written of the links between translation and autobiography—according to him, “*literary* translating engages and complicates the self, and may turn into an opportunity for simultaneous self-telling and self-invention (55).” The broken mirror allows Rushdie to see a distorted vision, not just of India, but ultimately of himself. By translating himself he is creating a different version of himself. “Our identity is at once plural and partial,” he claims (15). Rajan points out that despite their autobiographical similarities, Rushdie and Hyder “do not inhabit adjacent spaces in the subcontinent’s literary history (37).” By writing in English, Rushdie puts himself in a different categorization than Hyder, who, writing ‘originally’ in Urdu, is considered a regional writer. But their distance on the Indian literary universe is not what significantly differentiates them.

Hyder, deeply conscious not just of her own ‘plural’ identity, but of India’s, refuses to acknowledge a partiality of her identity or a partition of India’s. Her India is old, older than the river, older than time; it has endured conquest and colonization and must endure Partition. Her narrative is a reminder of “what men choose to forget.” *Aag ka Darya*, written closer to the moment, lacks distance. Even though Hyder is essentially exiled when she writes it, she isn’t yet ‘translated’. After the book is published in Pakistan in 1959, Hyder has no option but to leave Pakistan—the book refuses to revel in nationhood and a national identity that is exclusive. She moves to England, working for the BBC for a few years. Eventually she sails back to the subcontinent; her mother alights at Karachi, she continues on to Bombay. Hyder has never written, nor spoken, about her decision to return to India; I suspect if asked, she would respond like she did to the deletion of her epigraph, with a nonchalance that belies the significance of the moment.

Hyder has always referred to *River of Fire* as a transcreation, because that is what she saw it as—the fifth movement of her tale of syncretic India. The ‘story’ may not change, but the storyteller has changed. Hyder is no longer the same person who left the station. Rushdie may call himself the translated man, but she has drowned in her river of fire and emerged on the other side. Ramone writes that

Rushdie’s translation is one of languages and structures as well as stories, and he explicitly produces stories which are inspired by oral narrative forms, while they are written in a new English language in a bid to possess that language rather than allowing these stories to become possessed by the language of the former colonizers. (4)

Hyder, writing *Aag ka Darya* in 1959, preempts Rushdie by adopting the form of the Urdu *dastan* as the vehicle for her story; the oral romance/ epic form relies on repetitive patterns that embed themselves in the listener’s mind—this is precisely the result Hyder

is hoping for—by continuously repeating the absorptive character of India’s history, Hyder hopes to convince the reader of its truth. It is also subversive. Ramone finds that “in Rushdie’s work, translation always involves temptation and transgression.” By translating her work into English, Hyder is not making her literary creation available to an English (read Western) readership; she is expanding the lexicon required to properly capture her India. After all, just as Rushdie writes “we are not willing to be excluded from any part of our heritage (15),” so Hyder claims her right to English as part of her literary heritage.

But she goes beyond; by sticking to the narrative style of the *dastan* and by steeping her text in untranslated/ untranslatable references, she is ensuring that it is the outsider’s view that is partial. There is a scene towards the end of *River of Fire*; Kamal is sailing back to India after years in England. He is accompanied by some Englishmen, one of whom a poet, explains Forster to the others: “Dr. Aziz is no longer Indian—Muslims are now identified only with Pakistan (368).” Kamal still reeling from this renewed realization of his statelessness, hears a Maharashtrian woman singing a song of the child Krishna stealing butter. Kamal, and another Indian passenger, the Hindu Pandit Gaur, are drawn to the woman’s singing.

“Every culture has its secret language,” said the British poet, “and Kamal and the Pandit share it. That is the whole point. If a westerner were to write a novel about India he probably wouldn’t understand why they’re both so carried away by that song.” (369)

Rushdie and Hyder, despite their differences in style and outlook, share this “secret language.”

The transition between *Aag ka Darya* and *River of Fire* cannot be considered an interlingual translation, at least according to the conventional definition of decoding and recoding from one language/ culture system to another. There is spatial and temporal translation at play; it is time and distance that has altered the perspective. “The entire symbol of India is the journey. The habit of always travelling, always searching . . .” writes Hyder (418). *River of Fire* is just another stop on this journey. By writing two versions of her tale, Hyder is not attempting to mend a rift between plural identities—hers or India’s; she is reiterating her belief in the constant oneness of that identity.

V:

Conclusion

Khalid Hasan writes that late in life Qurratulain Hyder, who wrote all her books longhand, suffered from a stroke and lost the ability to write with her right hand, so she taught herself to write with her left. She sent him a copy of one of her books, with a hand-written inscription, “*ba'en hath ka khel.*” According to Hasan “the literal translation may be ‘a trick with the left hand,’ but it means ‘executed with the least effort...’ This anecdote encapsulates Hyder’s attitude to translation, self-translation and the self: Eliot, Faiz; Urdu, English; left hand, right hand, they are all hers to use to construct the narrative.

Hyder has always referred to *River of Fire* as a transcreation of *Aag ka Darya*; there are certainly too many significant variances between the two texts for the English to be considered a translation of the Urdu—at least in terms of conventional translation theory. By not calling her work a translation, Hyder is hinting at her later novel’s true purpose: it is meant to be read as the fifth cycle of her Indian epic. As I have argued previously, Hyder manipulates text (not merely her own, but text borrowed from multiple sources from multiple cultures and languages) to further her narrative. Kumkum Sangari claims that “the implied reader (one who follows the cues), a reader of Indian and English classic and popular literature, besieged by a plethora of generic codes and narrative from Sanskrit drama to French existentialism, is positioned to pursue the openness of this referential structure (32).” Ultimately, the story of *Aag ka Darya* and *River of Fire* is the story of India, and India seen through millennia, always drawing strangers to her—be

they scholars or conquerors, travelers and writers—and absorbing their stories, their ways.

Hyder's India, named after the mighty Indus that birthed one of the oldest civilizations known to man, is crisscrossed by her many rivers; the river becomes a useful metaphor, running through both novels. The river is sometimes the flow of time, sometimes words; it is what divides people and what helps them come together; the river is fed by many tributaries, each bringing water from different sources. Two of India's rivers, the Ganges and the Jamuna have given a name to the syncretic nature of India, particularly associated with the court of Oudh: *ganga-jamuni*. As I have mentioned previously that while Hyder's tendency as a translator is to reduce, she does, in fact, choose to expand her focus on the kingdom of Oudh, even adding an episode which does not feature in *Aag ka Darya*. She writes in some length on Malika Kishwar, the mother of Vajid Ali Shah, the last king of Oudh. Vajid Ali Shah finds himself dethroned when the British decide that they want to bring Oudh under their direct rule. His mother, with a retinue of over a hundred people, decides to sail to England to plead her son's case with Victoria. She brings the Empress all sorts of expensive gifts, including a phial of rare perfume, which catches Victoria's eye. Malika, unable to speak English, says in Urdu, "In our country when a guest leaves, he is given a phial of perfume (155)." Hyder writes that "the interpreter did not translate this correctly and Queen Victoria thought Malika wished to leave." Almost a classic case of 'lost in translation,' this episode also serves to highlight Hyder's fear of mistranslation. Malika Kishwar's gift of perfume was intended as a reminder to Victoria that the rulers of India had considered the English guests and it was time for them to leave; did the interpreter make linguistic mistakes or was the

message doomed from the beginning—could the Germanic Victoria ever understand the coded message? Did Malika Kishwar err in her choice of interpreter or her choice of medium?

“In the demand for Pakistan, Urdu was most thoughtlessly declared to be the language of a ‘separate Muslim nation’, so now it is also paying the price for the creation of the ‘homeland’. In India it has almost become a non-language,” writes Kamal in a letter from Pakistan. I have argued that Hyder chose to write *River of Fire* in English, not because (or perhaps not only because) she hoped to reach a wider readership; she wrote in English because, post-Partition, English became the only medium appropriate to the (hi)story of a composite India. The Urdu text served to underscore the rupture caused by Partition—the void after the date, Hindustan 1947; the English is the acknowledgement that this may just be another blip—this is not the longed-for-dawn, therefore on we go! Both texts must be treated as original. Anna Oldfield has mentioned that “Hyder does not pretend that the ‘secret language’ of culture is translatable, or even always learnable,” and that Hyder is aware that “there are areas that the mono-English-speaking reader cannot access;” so what is she trying to achieve by retelling her story in another language? Hokenson’s insight into the bilingual text is a pertinent explanation of Hyder’s motives:

Self-translators in particular labor to construct texts in which we can often discern, stereoscopically, two social systems and their canons set in a unique relationship, inter-echoing. Thereafter, in its original modes, their bilingual text can often seem to be flying free, in both languages, indebted but untethered to either canon. (55)

Hokenson and Munson have similarly claimed that “the interlingual space between linguistic versions need not be foreclosed by difference but may be opened up

by it (11).” By examining some of the most obvious differences between the two texts, I have argued that Hyder’s work cannot be read within the constraints of traditional translation theory as the hierarchy of languages is not directly relevant to her narrative. Given India’s colonial past, there is an undeniable politicization of language, and Hyder acknowledges that by incarnating G.N. Dutt as the Bengali *babu*, alienated from his own culture by his acquisition of English; but Hyder sees English as just one more foreign influence in a long cycle of such influences. Therefore, her translation transcends the center/ periphery, domestication/ foreignization matrix. Tymoczko maintains that the intended reader of the translation will determine the strategy the translator will adopt. In line with Sangari’s analysis that “the novels work at once through a grid of familiarity and through the ‘estrangement’ of over-typification (39),” I have argued that Hyder’s approach to translation is ambiguous and her English text does not seem to support the theory that she is “translating” for an English-speaking, Western reader. Indeed, for Hyder, as for many self-translators according to Hokenson and Munson, “the translator is the author, the translation is an original, the foreign is domestic, and vice versa (161).” By playing with this duality, Hyder is creating an expansive, elastic “cat’s cradle,” the term Steiner used to describe Beckett and Nabokov’s work.

Self-translation is as central to Hyder’s oeuvre as it is to Beckett or Nabokov’s. Mary Besemeres has raised the question of whether the process of self-translation suggests a multiple self. If the old Italian adage *traduttore, traditore* implies betrayal at the heart of translation, then what of self-translation? Is there a loss of self in translation, a disloyalty to oneself? Besemeres offers an elegant solution; she claims that “a person’s ‘identity’ is their answer to someone else’s question ‘who are you?’” while “‘Self’ refers

to a person's whole inner life, which is not exhausted by this one question (21)." She quotes Julien Green, another bilingual writer: "Cette question de langage m'a toujours passionné, car c'est notre substance même qui est en cause." I believe that in Hyder's case her language is not Urdu, nor English, but an extended, blurred boundaries version of both—this is where her essence lies. By translating her story, one that has visceral meaning for her, she is creating the space necessary for the realization of her primordial self, beyond identity.

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