Sand, Sound, and Semantics: Unveiling the Linguistic Inventiveness of *Ret Samadhi*

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ABSTRACT

Ret Samadhi, which has been translated into English as *Tomb of Sand*, is an exceptional work of art that captures the essence of sound symbolism and linguistic inventiveness in a unique way. This article delves into the nuances of this piece and analyzes the ways in which it conveys meaning through sounds and language. The use of onomatopoeia, alliteration, and rhythm in *Ret Samadhi* adds a layer of complexity to the piece and enhances its ability to convey emotion(s) and mood(s). Through a close reading of the text, this article explores how sound symbolism and linguistic inventiveness contribute to its overall impact and the meaning-making process and makes it a wonderful creation.

KEYWORDS

Sound Symbolism; Linguistic Inventiveness; Onomatopoeia; Alliteration; Octogenarian; Partition; Play on Metaphors; *Samadhi*; Untranslatability; *Dhwani;* Hindi-Esque; Alliteration; Assonance.

The literary world was abuzz with excitement and anticipation as Geetanjali Shree and Daisy Rockwell's *Tomb of Sand* won the International Booker Prize. This significant win has brought renewed appreciation and interest in Hindi literature, as well as works translated from other Indian languages into English. The timing of the award was particularly opportune, given the National Education Policy 2020's proposed establishment of an Institute of Translation and Interpretation to promote Indian languages and literature globally. The achievement is not to be underestimated, as it is only the second major international literary award won by an Indian author since Gurudev Tagore's Nobel Prize in 1913. The International Booker Prize win has injected fresh vitality into not just Indian literature, but also other local arts and cultural products, such as indigenous films, music, and yoga.

1.1 The Summary of Events

Divided into three parts, the novel *Ret Samadhi* features an 80-year-old 'octogenarian heroine' (*Tomb of Sand*, Daisy Rockwell 735) Ma who is the central character and the entire story revolves around her whims, fancies, nostalgia, memories, aspirations, and adventures. She goes into unplumbed depression after the sudden demise of her husband and her family was not able to guess her agony though they try to bring her back to that situation. An average or even avid reader will find it difficult to locate the exact viewpoint of the novelist she wants to convey because the novel has been written from many perspectives, but Ma, (this goes without saying, even) is found or rather fit into every perspective built to develop the

plot. Even the novelist reiterates this by giving adequate place to Ma and other women characters as well. She affirms it (in the beginning itself),

> A tale tells itself. It can be complete, but also incomplete, the way all tales are. This particular tale has a border and women who come and go as they please. Once you've got women and a border, a story can write itself. (*Tomb of Sand*, Daisy Rockwell 11)

The mother-daughter relationship (of Ma and her daughter, of course) is a significant feature of the novel, it is so internally woven within the plot that it becomes difficult to understand- who is the mother and who is the daughter. Ma, in due course of time, also develops a close affinity for Rosie who is a *hijra* (transgender). She, gradually, opens up in the company of Rosie and visits Pakistan, taking Beti with her, and there are flashbacks to her reminiscences of partition (of India into India and Pakistan) and her childhood life. *Ret Samadhi* is a classic page-turner, complete with cliffhangers and plot twists. (*Ret Samadhi*, Gitanjali Shree 734)

> There were two women, one death. There were also men, who were alive, and men who were dead, there was a transgender who was both. The bug, the elephant, the compassion, the door, Ma, the cane, the bundle, Bade, Beti, the Reeboks that Bahu wore, and the rest of the gang are characters in this story. There was also an un-named friend of Sid (grandson) who was griping about being excluded from the story, and says that he would find a new story! (*Tomb of Sand*, Daisy Rockwell 11-12)

The novel presents a detailed narration of the earth-shattering episode(s) of partition also which has been written about from different perspectives of the many writers. She brings the names of significant partition writers like *Krishna Sobti, Khushwant Singh, Bhisham Sahni, Joginder Pal, Manto, Rahi Masoom Raza, Intizar Hussain, Ramanand Sagar, Manzoor Ehtesham, Rajinder Singh Bedi* etc. in the novel itself. Pakistan and partition have got an adequate place in the narration of the story. Ma crossed the borders once, when, she was young but now she is back to (re)live her love therefore she feels herself young again.

As has been mentioned earlier also, Ma is the central focus of the novel, she narrates the climax of her epochal story. She comes across with her ex-husband, and sings a *thumri* (a kind of vocal genre of Indian music) she becomes a real damsel (though very old) who was very much upset because of their separation. As every woman has, her ex-husband is an undisclosed part of her life. Ma becomes a revolutionary to find her forgotten husband to relive her dreams before she dies. She crosses every difficulty and finds her ex-husband in Pakistan – as an act of *Inquilab* (a revolution). Her love is real and revolutionary and she is even ready to die for it.

1.2 *Ret Samadhi*: A Play on Metaphors

The translation of *Ret Samadhi* as *Tomb of Sand* is basically a big play on metaphors. It will not be an exaggeration to say that *Ret Samadhi* is a poetic expression of metaphors. The title itself is a metaphorical expression as it embodies at least three meanings (many others may also be possible). They may be:

> 1). A state of deep meditation; a trance; the final stage of yoga,
> 2). Self-immolation of an ascetic by entombment,
> 3). Place of entombment, especially of a saintly personage, or one who has died heroically. (2022 VII)

Even otherwise, there may be many more meanings besides these three. Secondly,

the book does not clearly indicate the person who has been narrated and called as 'a tomb of sand' whether it is Ma or somebody else. This is how the novel plays a game with different metaphors. The general sentences and words are crafted with the help of similes and metaphors. Some examples have been cited from the target and source text(s),

Geetanjali Shree writes,

बल्कि औरत भर भी। कहानी है। सुगबुगी से भरी। फिर जो हवा चलती है उसमें कहानी उड़ती है। जो घास उगती है, हवा की दिशा में देह को उकसाती, उसमें भी, और डूबता सूरज भी कहानी के ढेरों कंदील जलाकर बादलों पर टाँग देता है। (*Ret Samadhi*, Gitanjali Shree 8)

Daisy Rockwell translates,

Women are stories in themselves, full of stirrings and whisperings that float on the wind, that bend with each blade of grass. The setting sun gathers fragments of tales and fashions them into glowing lanterns that hang suspended from clouds. (*Tomb of Sand*, Daisy Rockwell 11)

Geetanjali Shree writes,

दो औरतें, एक माँ, एक बेटी, एक छोटी होती, एक बड़ी होती, एक हँस कर कहती कि मैं दिन प्रतिदिन छोटिया रही हूँ, दूसरी दुखी होती पर न कहती कि वो देख रही है वो रोज़ बुढ़ा रही है।(*Ret Samadhi*, Gitanjali Shree 8)

Daisy Rockwell translates,

Two women: one mother, one daughter, one going downwards, the other growing upwards. One Love send says, I am growing a smaller by the day! The other is saddened, but says nothing when she *sees* herself growing bigger. (*Tomb of Sand*, Daisy Rockwell 12)

Geetanjali Shree writes,

बस सीधी सी, सादी भी, ईंट सीमेंट की, पिलियाहट लिए, सफ़ेद पुती मध्यमवर्गीय दीवार थी। छत, फर्श, खिड़की, दरवाज़े को सँभाले, पानी के पाइप, बिजली के तार, केबल-शेबल का जाल भीतर बिछाये, पूरे घर को दीवारी लिफ़ाफ़े में तहा के सहेजने वाली। (*Ret Samadhi*, Gitanjali Shree 10)

Daisy Rockwell translates,

It was just a simple brick- and- cement wall-- a yellowing, whitewashed, middle class wall, holding the ceiling, floor, window and door to together, with the network of pipes, wires and cables arrayed within enfolding the entire home and in its willfulness. (*Tomb of Sand,* Daisy Rockwell 16)

Through the help of the said citations and their translations, it can be observed that the entire narration of *Ret Samadhi* seems to be a complex genus of different kinds of metaphors. Writer and translator, Ma and Beti, Hindi and English, modern and burgeoning mindsets and old-fashioned and adventurous are some of the underlying form(s) of metaphors that are quite discernible as soon as the reader goes into it and starts reading the text. Ma is a great metaphor in herself. She uses metaphorical language and it sometimes becomes a bit difficult to translate into the target language. The relationship between Ma and Beti is also filled with many metaphors as they giggle like girls and play *antakshari.* (a kind of spoken parlour game)

1.3 Meaning Conveyed through Sounds

It is a proven fact that language requires words in some order or sound (*dhwani*) that generates a meaning which is more meaningful than words. A particular order or a rhythmic pattern of the words clarifies even the hidden layers of the sense of what can be felt or

understood and can't be expressed through words. Daisy Rockwell accepts it,

> I have striven throughout my translation to recreate the text as an English dhwani of Hindi, seeking out wordplays, echoes, etymologies, and coinages that feel Hindi-esque. (*Tomb of Sand*, Daisy Rockwell 735)

Sounds are given more importance than the words in both *Ret Samadhi* and *Tomb of Sand*. Geetanjali Shree values sound (*dhwani*) more than any other thing which shows beautiful crafting on the use of words to express the ideas/feelings which are tough to convey in writing. She says "Dhwani is an echo, a vibration, a resonance. It is alliteration and assonance." (*Tomb of Sand*, Daisy Rockwell 735) While language is all about sounds in order, not all sounds are well-meaning words – like the sound 'chh' to show disagreement and 'hmm' for agreement. In writing, these sounds can become platitudinous, and even may not offer the expected meaning, unless the writer explains the signifying emotion(s) with which they emerge. We find many sounds that are accepted in writing too, these sounds convey a peculiar meaning(s). Ample of these sound-like words have found a place in *Ret Samadhi* and have been translated in the same peculiar way by Daisy Rockwell *Tomb of Sand*. I have chosen some of them:

1. Bad-bad (बड़-बड़) translated as- gibberish
2. Kitkitati thand (किटकिटाती ठंड) translated as- tooth chattering cold
3. Khijati-khafati (खीजती, खफ़ाती) translated as- irritable, upset
4. Sans par sans par sans chalati (साँस पर साँस पर साँस चलाती) translated as- breathing breath after breath after breath
5. Ankh nak band, kan thapp, muh sila, man sunn, arman nadarad, (आँख नाक बंद, कान ठप्प, मुँह सिला, मन सुन्न, अरमान नदारद) translated as- eyes and nose closed, ear shut, mouth sewn, mind numb, desire extinct
6. Granny (ग्रैनी) –translated as- daadi
7. Pipiyati (पींपींयाती)- translated as- sings
8. Dhamdahm dhammakko (धमधम धमक्को)- translated as- zesting, zing-zanging pizzazz,
9. Farfar, fadfad, fadak, fadak (फरफर फड़फड़ फड़क फड़क) translated as- flutter, flitter, flap flap flap
10. Lapakati-khiskati (लपकती खिसकती) translated as- leaping- dragging

Daisy Rockwell is very much aware of the fact that a creative piece of writing is crafted through the innovative narration of language, intended through particular ideology, psychology of characters, rhythmic patterns of sounds etc. This can also be noticed in the translation of the words used to signify particular sounds. For example, *bad-bad (बड़-बड़)* which is translated as 'gibberish.' We can also find words like 'blather', 'splutter', 'drivel' etc. for the same expression but 'gibberish' seems to be alright here. The phrase *khijati-khafati (खीजती, खफ़ाती)* has been translated as 'irritable' and 'upset' which do not reflect the same sound patterns as in Hindi. Gitanjali Shree has used 'Granny' (in the original text written in Hindi) while Daisy has translated it into 'Daadi' to render it into more effective sounds. Though Daisy is a prolific translator of the Hindi text and has been translating for years but some words are very local and indigenous in their nature hence, sometimes becomes a bit tricky to render them into the target language, as is the case with the word Pipiyati (पींपींयाती) which is translated as 'sings' which is not much appropriate because it is not simply singing alone but singing with whistling. Some more citations are given from both texts,

Geetanjali Shree writes,

अब तो मैं नही उठूँगी। अब्ब तो मैं नइ उठूँगी। अब्ब तो मैं नइई उठूँगी। अब मैं नयी उठूँगी। अब तो मैं नयी ही उठूँगी।
(*Ret Samadhi*, Gitanjali Shree 12)

Daisy Rockwell translates,

> Noooooo, I won't rise nowwww. Nooo rising nyooww. Nyoo riiise nyoooo. Now rise new. Now, I'll rise anew. (*Tomb of Sand*, Daisy Rockwell 21)

Geetanjali Shree writes,

> चुपकी के बाद बोलो और लयदार मुहावरा बोलो तो आवाज़ गा जाती है। कुछ पीं पीं पींपींयाती। कुछ लहरिल लहराती। कि च्च चिल्ला ज्जजाड़ा दिन चचालीस, पूस के पपंद्रह माघ पपच्चीस। (*Ret Samadhi*, Gitanjali Shree 14)

Daisy Rockwell translates,

> Speaks, after silence, and quotes a melodious proverb. The voice sings. A wavy wave. That bbbitter cccold for ffforty days ffffiffteeen for Poos, twenty fffffive ffffor Mmmmagh. (*Tomb of Sand*, Daisy Rockwell 26)

Even otherwise, this goes without saying that Daisy Rockwell has tried to abandon many of the complexities and nuances while presenting it to the reader(s) because even the source text is or may be difficult to understand at times. In fact, Daisy has made her translations much simpler without compromising the innovativeness of the source text, rather sometimes has improved upon the source text by contributing to its meaning. (as in the translation of granny –'daadi') Spoken-Hindi and literary-Hindi are always different as has been the case with any language, it is hence fiction written with a lot of linguistic innovations demands a deep and close reading and understanding while translating it. Rockwell has precisely fulfilled certain needs and requirements of the task (of translation) and has created a wonderful (rather artful) translation of *Ret Samadhi* into *Tomb of Sand.* It is for the

same reason that *Tomb of Sand* as a translation is about innovation as much as the original *Ret Samadhi* is in Hindi.

1.4 Untranslatability Issue(s)/Problems of Equivalence

Once a reader reads the original text *Ret Samadhi* by Geetanjali Shree, s/he will enjoy reading it though at times s/he may find it difficult because of the dexterous play on the words, even an expert reader may find it onerous to gather the meaning of many of the words used within a page since the writer exploits her complete knowledge of Hindi, Punjabi, Karaili, Bhojpuri, Urdu, and English in the elucidation of facts related to the plot. Along with Bhojpuri, the words of Urdu have also got an adequate place in the composition of the book in order to create a good sense of music in the language. Shree has used many words of English also to normalize the use of concurrent construction. The words like प्रैक्टिस (Practice), हॉट-वॉटर (Hot-water), मल्टीनेशनल(Multinational), केबल (cable), जॉगिंग (jogging), टैलकम पाउडर (talcum powder), नॉटी गर्ल (naughty girl), गेट-अप (get-up), अप एंड अबाउट (up and about), ऑसम (awesome), बाथरूम (bathroom), एंट्री (entry), विक्ट्री (victory), प्राइवेसी (privacy), इनक्यूबेटर (incubator) are usually found in the chapters.

The same is also the case with Daisy Rockwell, when a reader starts reading the translated *Tomb of Sand,* s/he will probably find that the English version is the original one and s/he will take the same kind of enjoyment. The untranslatability issues or problems of equivalence are always there in a translated text, sometimes it becomes next to impossible to find the equivalents in the target language but when the translator is Daisy Rockwell (can't say about the French translation(s) of Annie Montaut as I haven't read that) we can expect anything to happen as she has done in the case of *Ret*

Samadhi. If someone says that this is untranslatable, Daisy has translated that and not only translated but has given a new meaning to that. I have chosen around 20 words to deal with untranslatability issues or problems of equivalence (from the beginning five chapters)

1. Mukammal (मुक़म्मल) translated as-complete
2. Sarhad (सरहद) translated as- border
3. Arampaar (आरम्पार) translated as- go as they please
4. Sugbugi (सुगबुगी) translated as- full of strrings and whisperings
5. Kandeel (कंदील) translated as- lantern
6. Ghumawati (घूमावती) translated as- twisting and turning
7. Antarghat (अन्तर्घट) translated as- within
8. Chotiya (छोटिया) translated as- growing downwards
9. Sifat (सिफ़त) translated as- make
10. Bargala (बरगला) translated as- misleading
11. Kansari (कंसारी) translated as- leftover mash
12. Bekhtar (बेखतर) translated as- fearlessly
13. Behartaur (बहरतौर) translated as- anyway
14. Hahant (हाहंत) translated as- hullabaloo
15. Budhhriya (बुढ़रिया) translated as- old lady
16. Ankav (अंकाव) translated as- not translated
17. Andazana (अन्दाज़ना) translated as- testing
18. Piliyahat (पीलियाहट) translated as- yellowing
19. Enchna (ऐंचना) translated as - pulling
20. Algati (अलगाती) translated as - at bay

A close analysis of the given words indicates that finding equivalents is not at all easy but difficult and leads to ambiguities also at times. For example, the word *Sarhad (सरहद)* is more mental or based on human predicament while its equivalent 'border' is more geographical or political in its use. Similarly, *Kandeel (कंदील)* is a kind of lamp used in traditional India but the English translation 'lantern' is a bit sophisticated instrument used for providing lights. In the same way, *Andazana (अन्दाज़ना)* is a kind of continuous process of anticipating or guessing something going to happen and it is translated as 'testing' which may be appropriate as per the context but not as appropriate if gone by the literal translations. Hence in the entire task of the translation, the selection of the equivalents for the target language depends on the contextual and hidden meanings conveyed therein.

Along with the use of different words from different languages, the translation of *Ret Samadhi* as *Tomb of Sand* by Daisy Rockwell offers a good trajectory or a fine play on different parts of speech. There is wide (but not universal) agreement that the main aim of the translator is to produce as nearly as possible the same effect on the readers as was done in the case of the original. The principle is variously referred to as the principle of similar or equivalent response. It bypasses and supersedes the nineteenth-century controversy about whether a translation should incline towards the source or the target language, and the consequent faithful versus beautiful, literal versus free, and form versus content disputes. Daisy has done exactly like this and hence sometimes it appears that *Tomb of Sand* is real and *Ret Samadhi* is the reflection.

The translation of *Tomb of Sand* is a creative piece of art and it asks us to cross borders of dialects, languages, cultures, and traditions like its central character Ma and try to make a new

beginning in whatever condition or even when there is an Indo-Pak border between. Even Daisy says, "*Tomb of Sand* is above all a love letter to the Hindi language." (*Tomb of Sand*, Daisy Rockwell, 735) She appears to be a live character of the translation; complex but translatable. She herself says I'm "a place where a plethora of new stories and characters await the moment they will take shape." (*Tomb of Sand*, Daisy Rockwell 254)

1.5 Linguistic Inventiveness

Ret Samadhi offers some of the common features of Shree's style of writing — non-linear sentences, intellectually stimulating conversations, colloquial words, paradigmatic shifts of the dialects, street language, and music-like words and phrases which directly hit the heart emotionally rather than the mind intellectually. This peculiarity where non-linear sentences establish a tone of communication, the prevailing context(s) and perspectives are sometimes confusing, but most of the time it is deeply engaging. Literary circles believe that she re(discovers) new avenues of the old style (of storytelling) which is creative and touching at one place and paves a strong ground for acceptance of Hindi on the international stage at the second place. Mayank Jain Parichha aptly points out in this connection,

> To translate a work like *Ret Samadhi*, which even those whose first language is Hindi would find tough to grapple with, would require skill and literary dexterity on the part of the translator. Oftentimes, a complaint is heard that translators simply choose an interpretative style, and try to simplify narratives, in effect intruding upon the work. Sometimes a translator removes some parts of a novel and sanitizes it to make it politically correct to attract readers. Such renditions raise valid and complex questions about the dilemmas inhering in the project of translation. The presumption here is that the translator needs to give to readers what the author has originally intended. (Mayank Jain Parichha F1)

Daisy Rockwell has been a celebrated and liked translator of Indian languages including Urdu also (she earlier translated the works of Bhisham Sahni, Krishna Sobti, and Upendranath Ashk). She renders *Ret Samadhi* into English staying as far as possible real to the complicacies of Shree's style and densities. As a translator, Daisy knows and understands that the reader wants to feel the original writer, her peculiar way of using words, collocations, portrayal of feelings, and above all charismatic, creative use of the language itself, it is in the light of the fact that Daisy has translated the entire text and used translation as an art of innovations in this project called *Tomb of Sand*, which, interestingly, is not the exact translation of the Hindi title. The title *Ret Samadhi* is used by the author in a metaphorical sense, hence, is a bit difficult to translate as such in English (can be done but will require a long commentary on it). Translation is not always about losing something or the other in the entire process but something is gained also and that attainment of the words is the act of creativity. Even Rockwell aptly replies removing all the issues of originality and allegations of meanings lost in translation,

> One should not view a translation as an imperfect representation of a superior and unattainable original. Read translations as original works and you will be much happier. People always obsess about what is lost in translation. It has become a cliché. Of course, things are lost in translation! But is that bad? They

might not have even been good things. And much is gained in translation. A translation is an interpretation, a refraction, a reworking, and as such it contains something old, but also contains something new. (*Tomb of Sand*, Daisy Rockwell 745-46)

It is a fact of the matter that Rockwell has striven hard to create an original like ambience while translating it. She has created a Hindi-esque style of writing in her translation which is both creative and faithful to the original. She shares her experiences of translating Ret Samadhi,

> What is a translator to do with a text that is focused on its own linguicity (not a real word, I know)? I have striven throughout my translation to recreate the text as an English dhwani of Hindi, seeking out wordplays, echoes, etymologies, and coinages that feel Hindi-esque. I have also included many fragments of poetry, prayer, prose, and songs in the original language, alongside their English renderings, and even the occasional fragment of the original that was too good to leave behind. Readers who are not familiar with the South Asian linguistic landscape will find the text packed with words and phrases from Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, and Sanskrit. What they may not realize is that the original text was similarly packed with English. (*Tomb of Sand*, Daisy Rockwell 745-46)

As has been mentioned in the abstract and also been said by Daisy Rockwell translation cannot and should not be understood and taken as a transferring of meaning or message from one language (SL) to the other language (TL) but it has to be a considered a creative process where when something is lost then there is every possibility of gaining something new (or not said before) which will enrich the source text what Daisy herself has done in the case of *Tomb of Sand*. She has tried to make it an immortalizing process not a monotonous and useless activity where words are not poured from one bottle to another bottle. And this is the reason why *Tomb of Sand* became very popular and was able to fetch the Booker Prize International.

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