

Introduction

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A woman who pours “all the darkness within her” into a coffee mug, age slipping out of a body “like a tree shedding its bark,” a woman’s outbursts evoking “the smell of burnt chilies”—these are but a few of the many striking images that one encounters in the short stories collected in this book. Originally written in Odia, the language spoken in the eastern Indian province of Odisha, the stories span a period of more than a century—a period that witnessed the rise of the Indian independence movement, the expansion of education, and the demise of the British Raj, as well as the partition of India and Pakistan, persistent conflicts between Hindus and Muslims, and, more recently, the growth of regionalism and the impact of economic liberalization. Amidst the political and social upheavals of modernity, one constant has been an ongoing struggle to reconcile old and new, to arrive at some sort of integration, however uneasy, between customs and attitudes grounded in tradition and ideas and ways of life imported from the West.

These stories, written by women who are natives of Odisha, depict a world that, while continually in transformation, remains almost stubbornly familiar. Detailed in the stories are perennial themes in women’s lives—loving yet conflicted relationships; the difficulties and rewards inherent in the roles of mother, daughter, sister, and wife; the yearning for personal fulfillment and an independent life; the challenges of growing

old. But we also find poverty, religious intolerance, lawlessness, instability, and injustice. The characters in these stories must find their way in a world badly disfigured by human callousness and cruelty—quiet, cold-blooded indifference, as well as the hatred and violence that rob people of their dignity. Perhaps more than anything, what distinguishes these stories is their insistent honesty, their refusal to look the other way.

The Odia Short Story: A New Medium of Expression

The opening story in this collection—Reba Ray’s “Sanyasi” (“The Mendicant”)—was the first Odia short story written by a woman to appear in print. “Sanyasi” was published in 1899 in the recently founded literary journal *Utkal Sahitya*, roughly a year after the publication of Fakir Mohan Senapati’s “Rebati,” generally regarded as the first short story ever written in the Odia language.¹ While very different, these two early stories both explore the theme of vulnerability within the dynamics of family and culture. “Rebati” tells the story of a young girl’s pursuit of learning, at a time when formal education was a male prerogative. When a series of calamities subsequently destroys her family, Rebati’s illiterate grandmother turns on her, blaming her for the ill winds of fortune. But if Senapati’s adolescent heroine is shown to be vulnerable to the oppressive weight of tradition, Ray’s male protagonist, Shiva Prasad, stands in no more enviable a position. Ray’s story dramatizes her hero’s inability, as a dutifully submissive son, to protect his young bride from his own vicious, domineering mother. In the end, after losing his newborn child and then his wife, he flees his home and becomes a wandering mendicant—a *sanyasi*.

Ray published her short stories in a range of journals, later collecting them in a volume titled *Shakuntala* (1904). She also left an impressive body of poems, the most notable of which were anthologized in 1903 in *Anjali* (Offerings). This literary pioneer founded and edited *Asha*, a women’s magazine, as well as the literary journal *Prabhata*, regularly penning essays on social issues for both. The spirit of rebellion is embedded in the names of these publications—*Asha* means “hope,” while *Prabhata* means “morning” or “daybreak.” In 1905, Ray founded the Model Girls’ High School in Cuttack (then the capital city of Odisha), the first school to provide high school education to girls in Odisha. Her writings reveal

a deep interest in women's issues, as well as other concerns of the day, including harmony among different religious sects, personal integrity, spiritual growth, and nationalism.

Around the turn of the century, short stories were beginning to be written and published in many other regional languages of India. As Sisir Kumar Das (1991, 303–4) points out, literary journals were in large measure responsible for the rise of the short story:

The growth of the short story was partly regulated by the growing demand for stories by the reading public who preferred a complete story to parts of novels serialised in journals and periodicals. The editors of various journals, therefore, encouraged the popular novelists of their time to contribute stories to each issue. The situation was very much similar to that in contemporary Europe and America where journals played a dominant role in the development of the short story.

In Odisha, the journals *Utkal Sahitya* (founded in 1897) and *Asha* (founded in 1899), as well as *Mukur* (founded in 1906), all catered to an emerging literate public, while offering a privileged space for both male and female writers to explore new literary forms, among them the short story.

In Odisha (as elsewhere), storytelling was traditionally a social activity, with tales from Sarala Das's fifteenth-century Odia version of the *Mahabharata* recited in temple courtyards or Jagannath Das's fifteenth-century *Bhagabata* read aloud by priests in a room known as a *bhagabata tungi*, which soon became a standard feature of Odishan villages (Nayak 2013). Such ancient tales and devotional poems, from which listeners could sometimes draw parallels with their own experiences, were an integral part of people's day-to-day lives. With the advent of printing, however, reading—essentially a private pursuit—rapidly became a popular recreation among the educated classes. The short story was, like the novel, a Western genre, and both brought with them a new focus on the everyday and on relationships among ordinary people. In contrast to traditional narratives—folktales, mythological stories, legends, oral histories—readers were now offered characters and situations that felt immediately familiar to them, grounded as they were in contemporary social and political realities.

These literary developments coincided with the rise of Odia nationalism, which reflected a growing rebellion against not only British colonial

rule but also the hegemony of Bengali language and culture.² Many writers were also Odia nationalist leaders and were eager to create a body of literature that would set Odisha apart from neighbouring Bengal, with its robust intellectual and literary traditions. Accordingly, they produced novels, plays, and poems that emphasized a distinctively Odia identity, along with short stories that did the same. Early in the twentieth century, nationalist sentiment was becoming a key theme in Indian literature generally, and plays and novels were imbued with patriotic fervour, while also engaging in social critique. While, initially, the short story was comparatively free of political elements, writers soon began to use the short story as a vehicle for the expression of dissent.

Like writers elsewhere in India, Odia authors were caught up in the political and social unrest of the early twentieth century, depicting in their works the old order giving way to a new one, with traditional values challenged by modern ideas. In addition, the domain of Odia literature ceased to be dominated by men, as more and more female writers began to express themselves in fiction and nonfiction, focusing on the shifting complexities of women's lives.³

Spark of Light: An Overview

Owing to opportunities provided by the expansion of education during the late nineteenth century, women with the skills and confidence to express themselves through writing began to appear on Odisha's cultural scene. Although they came from various social classes and backgrounds, most belonged to upper-class, liberal families. Over the course of the century, more women would join their ranks, finding in the short story a powerful tool for not only self-expression and self-discovery but also critical reflection on their social and cultural surroundings, which so often threatened to submerge them. While it is impossible to discuss in detail each of the stories in this volume, we highlight a few recurring and interwoven themes below.

Several of the authors featured in this anthology explore how gender stereotyping limits the options available to women. In "Misery Knows No Bounds," by Sarojini Sahoo—a feminist writer who often deals candidly with the topic of female sexuality—we encounter a young girl who ends up trapped to her thighs in mud. Despite her apparently hopeless

situation, she remains convinced that she will be saved: this is not how she is destined to die. The heroine's transgression has been such a small thing, an understandable and virtually blameless action: in a natural desire to demonstrate that she possesses something of value, she brings to school a special pen that she received as a gift. When, on the way home from school, a classmate accidentally drops the pen into a weed-choked canal, the girl wades in to retrieve it, becomes trapped in the mud, and is then left alone as darkness gathers. Rejecting any passive, fatalistic response, the girl insists repeatedly that even if no one comes in search of her, she is going to survive this. After all, an astrologer has assured her that the real threat to her life will be fire. The reference brings to mind horrifying images related to bride burning, young women set aflame because their dowry is deemed inadequate, or the practice of *sati*, with widows coerced into immolating themselves on their husband's pyre. While the girl's response can be read as a defiant stance against the patriarchal forces that restrict women's options, denying them their rightful chance at a fulfilling and autonomous future, Sahoo problematizes her heroine's gestures toward agency by reminding us of the dangers—and the misery—that so many women today still face.

Other stories explore the experiences of women whose lives depart, for one reason or another, from the traditional female trajectory of devoted wife and mother. Basanta Kumari Patnaik's understated "In Bondage," for example, describes an unmarried woman who is treated like a maidservant by her brother's wife. Our nameless protagonist gradually awakens to the realization that, as an uneducated village woman with no husband and precious little family support, she barely registers as a human being. In Yashodhara Mishra's "The Trap," a divorced mother, haunted by memories of the abuse and neglect she had experienced in her marriage, clings to her son and cannot stop herself from nagging him, even though she is desperate to make the most of his all-too-brief vacation time. Although "A Kerchief of Sky," by Sanghamitra Mishra, begins by acknowledging the presence of primordial energy in all women, the daughter in this story opts to remain in a loveless marriage, as though unaware of her self-worth. Gayatri Sharaf's "A Mother from Kalahandi" presents us with a wife who finds that she is unable to have children. Despite her otherwise ideal marriage to a man who appears

to adore her, she eventually learns of his infidelity. Setting aside her initial heartbreak, she resolves to free the young village woman whom her husband had purchased to be his mistress and to raise their child as her own. And, in Chirashree Indrasingh's "Mother," a wife who has lost her baby son in a cataclysmic flood that has devastated the landscape becomes a symbol of life's renewal, her own ocean of milk nourishing the dreams and aspirations of all her people.

Needless to say, the threat of sexual violence, including rape, sometimes appears overtly, as female characters who lack the protection of a husband, money, or social status find themselves powerless against patriarchal privilege and the community's willful blindness to gender-based brutality. Both Binapani Mohanty's "Pata Dei" and Aratibala Prusty's "The Worn-out Bird" feature women who have given birth to a child as the result of rape and who fight back against their humiliation as best they can. The combative Pata defiantly chooses to face the world as a single mother, while, in Prusty's story, Gurei turns to murder to avenge the rape of her own illegitimate daughter. In contrast, in "The Vigil," written by Suprabha Kar some four decades before "Pata Dei," Malati—the "fallen woman" on whom the story turns—sees no choice but to end her own life.

Some stories turn on violence of a different sort. "They Too Are Human" is an unabashedly sentimental allegory about the senselessness of religious intolerance, with two young boys—one Hindu, the other Muslim—sacrificed by the adults who should be protecting them. As Sushila Devi's story unfolds, the opening scenes of innocent camaraderie give way to a violent riot, as the boys' respective communities, despite years of living peacefully side by side, turn on one another, caught up in the mounting Hindu-Muslim tensions that culminated in the partition of India and Pakistan. The power of these tensions to poison human relationships and disrupt the ordinary rhythms of daily life finds dramatic exploration in Sanjukta Rout's "Curfew," set during an outbreak of communal violence.

Other stories call attention to broader societal inequities, including poverty, corruption, and elitism. In "The Ring," by Pratibha Ray, a naïve older woman encounters kindness, indifference, and treachery in equal measure as she waits in vain for her son to awaken from a coma caused

by his fall from a rooftop while he was doing some work for a well-to-do neighbour. Paramita Satpathy's "Sin" describes a young child who is forced to bear the full weight of guilt for his entire family's destruction, simply because, through the most natural of instincts, he tried to help put food in the starving mouths of his siblings and parents. Unable to reconcile himself to innumerable injustices he witnesses, the male protagonist in Premalata Devi's "Man of the Century" embraces a life of crime, revelling in the death of moral principles and the worship of selfishness that herald the apocalypse. Corruption has spread its ugly web so insidiously among people that even creative artists such as writers, who are looked upon as society's conscience, have been caught up in it. In "A Writer's Alter Ego," Binodini Patra explores the hypocrisy of a writer who pretends to compassion but refuses to do a favour for a poor teacher who cannot suitably grease his palms—a man whose attitudes leave her questioning her own integrity.

"A Classic Image" offers another exploration of poverty and hunger, this time from the perspective of a narrator observing those around her as she waits for a train. She is taken aback when what seemed from a distance to be a black granite sculpture representing poverty turns out to be a very real family of beggars. Author Banaja Devi takes pains to avoid an overly simplistic binary: a wealthy woman waiting in the same train station gives generously to the family from the treats she has brought along for her son, who is on crutches, having lost a leg. As Devi suggests, there are "insects in every beautiful flower"—no neat division exists between fortune and misfortune. The story is a moral meditation on social responses to the perennial issue of poverty, a form of suffering so profound as to turn even sympathetic individuals to stone.

Madness, whether it is the result of a devastating calamity or an attempt to identify and communicate a more personal, internal trauma, comes up as a theme several times. The bereaved and poverty-stricken mother in "Ruins," by Gayatri Basu Mallik, is an object of equal parts pity and revulsion as she pathetically repeats over and over her final words of warning to her sons, all three of whom she lost in one tragic turn of fate. Susmita Rath's "The Sound of Silence" reminds us that feelings of despair and powerlessness may take unexpected forms. In Rath's story, a young woman, recently married to a man who doesn't

want her, silently expresses her anger and unhappiness through her body: she is incapacitated by noxious odours that she alone can smell. The story closes on a profoundly pessimistic note, as the suffering wife ends up cruelly exploited by her cynical husband, who, oblivious to her emotional pain, effectively denies her humanity.

Greed and its repercussions also make an appearance in “The Mystic Bird,” by Archana Nayak, a story that concerns the construction of the Balimela Dam, in south-western Odisha, which flooded much of the Chitrakonda region. The narrative revolves around a man named Singua, who belongs to the Keya, a tribal people living in the area. When Singua is still a young boy, his father, who has a smithy, is drawn into earning a living by cutting off the chains of escaped criminals. The father is eventually arrested, leaving the family in desperate straits. By chance, Singua learns about a rare bird, which could lead him to a root endowed with the power to sever bonds—offering him a way to return to his father’s lucrative practice. He stalks the bird, but the result is utter catastrophe. Singua is left blaming his own greed for the ensuing destruction of the landscape on which his people depend for their survival, and yet, as the story suggests, the real guilt lies elsewhere.

Another story with fantastical elements, albeit addressed in a very different manner, is Supriya Panda’s “Moonrise.” Each New Year’s Eve, Sujata, the heroine, receives letters from the ruffians who once broke into her home with the intention of murdering her. This tale unfolds in a dreamy fairytale atmosphere, despite the very real threat of violence, thereby managing to subvert our every expectation. Her grandfather clock, her postbox, and her oven engage in dialogue with Sujata, a baker beloved by the local children, whose parents simply cannot keep them away from her home or her delicious confections. A talented artisan and someone on whom her community depends, she is nonetheless taken for granted. Panda presents us here with a feminine variation on the Pied Piper theme. Rather than complain about or punish those who transgress against her, Sujata responds with altruism and wishes them “safe passage.” Grief and loss are turned to victory, cruelty to kindness, victimhood to power.

Other stories are woven around a world of fantasy that abruptly comes crashing down. In the ironically titled “A Fistful of Hope,” by Golap

Manjari Kar, readers are led to consider, in chilling detail, the experience of being physically disabled in a corrupt and uncaring system where love proves wholly inadequate. Mamata Dash's "The Lotus Man" takes us inside the mind of an educated young woman whose mother had dreamed of a better life for her but who finds herself trapped as the mistress of a brutal, jealous man. A mysterious lover made of lotus blossoms offers her temporary escape into a dream world of passion. Fantasy again bumps up against harsh reality in "Shadows of the Moon," in which Mona Lisa Jena (as both author and translator) unshrinkingly—but with considerable empathy for very human foibles—exposes a figure of romance as a liar and cheat.

One defining feature of the short story, as Edgar Allan Poe once pointed out, is that it can be read in a single sitting—and the microstory (sometimes called "flash fiction") typically demands less than a minute of a reader's time. Although the most famous example—"For sale: Baby shoes, never worn"—is said to have been written in the 1920s, the microstory seems an appropriate genre for a twenty-first-century readership forever in a rush and fully accustomed to texting and tweets.⁴ At the close of this collection, Pallavi Nayak and Deepsha Rath each offer their own lyrical examples of the form—what the latter memorably called "droplets"—no less hard-hitting for their brevity.

It goes without saying that these authors, born from 1875 through to the relatively late twentieth century, do not speak with anything like a unified voice. Rather, they offer an idiosyncratic spectrum of viewpoints, writing styles, and motifs, challenging us to let go of our preconceptions and respond to each author in turn. At the same time, despite the determined efforts of many characters to rebel and escape, themes of desperation and futility run throughout the collection, creating an almost oppressive atmosphere. More often than not, the stories reveal a bleak moral and spiritual landscape, fleetingly illuminated by moments of joy and tenderness—by a precious few sparks of light in the otherwise impenetrable darkness.

Of Differing Aesthetics

In the foreword to his acclaimed novel *Kanthapura* (1938), Raja Rao comments on the almost breathless tempo of life in India. Although he is

speaking of the challenge of capturing this tempo in English, his comment holds true of writing in any of India's numerous languages:

We, in India, think quickly, we talk quickly, and when we move we move quickly. There must be something in the sun of India that makes us rush and tumble and run on. And our paths are paths interminable. . . . The *Puranas* are endless and innumerable.⁵ We have neither punctuation nor the treacherous "ats" and "ons" to bother us—we tell one interminable tale. Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was and still is the ordinary style of our storytelling. (Rao [1938] 1967, vii–viii)

For readers who are accustomed to a more leisurely approach to narration, this brisk tempo can seem somewhat disorienting, with one scene giving way to another before readers are quite ready. As Rao notes, however, implicit in this almost frenetic quality is the experience of life in India. In terms of narrative structure, many of the stories achieve their impact through a sequence of relatively brief and often seemingly insignificant episodes that lead up to a dramatic moment of revelation, in which the emotional force of the story is distilled into a single symbolic action: a sister being introduced as a maidservant ("In Bondage"), an elderly woman removing the silver ring from her dead son's finger ("The Ring"), Sattar releasing the chickens from the hut during a curfew ("Curfew"), a little girl dancing away in Sobha's dream ("The Trap"), or Bunu hammering at the chicken's head with a slab of stone ("Sin").

Especially in the relatively early stories, the often quite intricate plot is elaborated through scenes that may seem melodramatic, in which characters rarely hide their emotions and little is left to the imagination. This tendency to spell out emotion is far from exclusive to this literature, however; it can be traced to the narrative style employed in traditional drama and dance. Classical Odishi dance, for example, is known for its use of *abhinaya*, whereby the emotions expressed in the accompanying music or songs are conveyed through the dancer's hand gestures (*mudrās*) and facial expressions. In the West, this stylized approach to the portrayal of emotion, which was commonplace in its tradition until the early twentieth century, has since given way to the understated naturalism that has come to dominate Western literature (as well as acting). It is thus helpful to

remember that what many Western readers today regard as melodrama was not always perceived as such. Rather, the heightening of emotion facilitated the audience's involvement in the action and thus contributed to catharsis.

While these stories may at times seem to violate Western assumptions about how "literature" should behave, we would argue that differences in content, form, and style are to be acknowledged and celebrated rather than held in suspicion, rooted as they are in the distinct traditions within and against which Indian authors are writing. Raised to believe that women should not speak their minds openly, and typically denied a place in male-dominated literary circles, female writers in Odisha, as in India generally, found in the short story a means of subversion and protest, often masking what is in fact sharp criticism behind a layer of irony and symbol. The multiplicity of voices in the stories collected here—sentimental, submissive, even pathetic, but also rebellious, firm, and bold—capture the predicament of those who live on the margins, those whose views are deemed irrelevant but who are nonetheless determined to be heard. By inviting us to expand our literary horizons, these stories also offer a comparative perspective from which to appreciate world literature more fully.

Odia Literature in English Translation

While the translation of texts into Odia can be traced back to the fourteenth century—it was, in fact, through the translation of Sanskrit texts that Odia came to be standardized—translation in the other direction has been nowhere near as robust. A collection of poems by Sachi Rout Roy appeared in English in 1942, but most scholars consider 1987 the year that Odia writing landed on the world stage—the year that Gopinath Mohanty's novel *Paraja* (1945) was published in English by Oxford University Press. Bikram K. Das's translation of that text has been termed "a decisive turning point in the history of transmission of Odia literature, opening up new vistas and drawing the attention of critics and readers outside" (Kar 2009, 18). Significantly, two years later, the first Sahitya Akademi Award (the Indian government's prestigious literary prize) in the English Translation category was conferred on this book.

The spread of Odia literature in translation is part of a broader movement: over the past several decades, Indian literature in translation has

undergone what Rita Kothari (2003, 2) calls “an unprecedented rise,” from “a marginal event to a pervasive trend.” Alongside the growing popularity of Indian writing in English, represented by such well-known authors as Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, and Aravind Adiga, tremendous energy has been devoted to translating Indian literature into English. The audience for this literature is twofold: while English-speaking audiences in other countries gain access to these texts, so do other groups in India, a country home to an almost dizzying array of languages and dialects in which English has long served as an essential link language as well as a lingua franca. As Kothari remarks, “Despite being a colonial relic and a neo-colonial instrument, English also functions today as an Indian language and fits into India’s linguistic universe without causing too much heartburn” (2003, 29). As she suggests, the recent increase in English translation activity strongly suggests the possibility of “a more dialogic, mutually profitable relationship” (26), not only among previously isolated cultural communities in India but also across international borders.

Although, as mentioned earlier, writings by women of Odisha began to be published as early as the turn of the twentieth century, it was not until the 1970s that many of these authors found venues where they could make their voices heard, and only much more recently did their work begin to be translated for foreign audiences. The first significant effort to present to English readers the imaginative world of women writers from Odisha was *Under a Silent Sun: Oriya Women Poets in Translation* (1992), edited by Jagannath Prasad Das and Arlene Zide, which brought together more than one hundred poems by thirty-seven poets. In prose, however, the first anthology to appear was *Oriya Women’s Writing: Essay, Autobiography, Fiction* (1997), compiled by a group of editors: Ganeswar Mishra and Paul St. Pierre, along with Arun K. Mohanty, Jatindra K. Nayak, and Trilochan Misra. Since the editors wished to emphasize the formal diversity of women’s writing, this slender volume, now out of print, includes one essay, two excerpts from autobiographies and three from novels, and five short stories.

Sachidananda Mohanty’s *Early Women’s Writings in Orissa, 1898–1950: A Lost Tradition* (2005) presents largely unknown work by twenty women who wrote during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—a period when women’s writing dealt with not only questions of gender and

identity but also contemporary cultural, political, and ideological issues. The anthology spans a wide range of genres—poetry, essays, short stories, excerpts from novels and autobiographies, and letters. These works had never before appeared in Odia-language anthologies, and many had long lain scattered in journals that were no longer in circulation.

Another significant contribution is *The Voyage Out: Contemporary Oriya Short Stories by Women* (2007), edited and translated by Sumanyu Satpathy. In the preface, Satpathy explains that his book

attempts to showcase the sharp departure that many Oriya women writers have made over a period of time: their moving away from cocooned domesticity and confinement within the patriarchal structures to the transgressive domains of alternative sexualities and inter-personal relationships. . . . What is common to most, if not all the stories collected here, is a kind of writing back to the patriarchal centre, to use a much-used feminist term. (11)

The twelve contemporary short stories included in *The Voyage Out*, all of which feature women in the role of protagonist, map out new areas of female sexual experience, including homosexuality, and explore various avenues of resistance to an oppressive patriarchal value system.

We had the pleasure, in 2010, of co-editing an anthology titled *One Step Towards the Sun: Short Stories by Women from Orissa*, published by the Bhubaneswar-based Rupantar Centre for Translation, which exists to promote Odia literature in English translation. The collection, which contained twenty-five stories, met with an enthusiastic response locally, with reviews appearing in various newspapers and journals. Twenty of the original twenty-five stories are reproduced here, along with six additional ones, including Reba Ray's "The Mendicant," which, despite its importance to the history of women's writing in Odia, was previously unavailable in English. In the present anthology, our goal was to present to an English-speaking audience a selection of short stories, all written by women, but dealing with a broad range of themes and situations, not all of which turn on issues of gender. We also wished to illustrate various styles of narration, in hopes of producing a representative sample of the short story as conceived and interpreted by Odishan women.

With this anthology, we aim to contribute to the dialogue enabled by the process of translation in hopes of collapsing the distance between

women in Odisha, writing in Odia, and English-speaking audiences both in other parts of India and elsewhere in the world. It should be borne in mind that reading in translation is necessarily a particular type of reading, at a distance from the original author and her text. Yet the translator's contribution to the wealth of literature available to us and to our reading pleasure should never be underestimated. After all, we tend to

talk without irony of enjoying Dostoyevsky, or Bei Dao, or Gabriel García Márquez, when what is often meant is that we have read them in mediated form, in words crafted by someone else entirely. . . . Avoiding translated works from some misguided sense that they are a mere crutch or even a betrayal of the original results in a parochial outlook, with the majority of the world's literary production necessarily remaining off limits. (Henitiuk 2012a)

Translation is anything but straightforward. Faced with the task of transposing meaning, mood, and literary style from one language and cultural idiom to another, translators necessarily make countless choices. Some strive to remain as close to the original as possible, while others translate more freely, seeking to capture the overall force of the original even if this requires taking certain liberties with, for example, sentence structure.⁶ While it may not be difficult to spot a bad translation, the question of what constitutes a "successful" literary translation has no single answer, and the answers that exist are frequently quite subjective.

In postcolonial contexts, the act of translation into the language of the colonizer is inevitably bound up with the legacy of imperialism and the ongoing domination of minority cultures by the culture of those who wield power, as well as the continued subjugation of women by men. In the face of this imbalance, we firmly believe in the value of ensuring that the voices of female artists from all parts of the globe will be heard. Until recently, authors in Odisha have had few English-language outlets for their writing, and such a wealth of literature still remains invisible to those who cannot read Odia. Furthermore, once made available in English, these short stories have a far larger potential readership and may even be subsequently translated into other tongues. It is our sincere hope that this volume will assist in bringing to the fore these and other women writing in Odisha and that, given this brief taste, English-speaking readers will demand—and be offered—a great deal more.

Notes

1. A staunch defender of Odia cultural identity and the author of four novels (in addition to numerous other works), Fakir Mohan Senapati is generally regarded as the father of modern Odia literature. He is known for his embrace of social realism, as "Rebati" well illustrates. Like Ray's "Sanyasi," Senapati's story appeared in *Utkal Sahitya*, which was founded in 1897 by writer and editor Viswanath Kar. The term *sāhitya* means "literature"; *Utkal* refers to the ancient kingdom of Utkala, which once occupied the northeastern part of what is today Odisha and was renowned for excellence in the arts and crafts.
2. For an in-depth discussion of the nationalist movement, see Nivedita Mohanty's *Oriya Nationalism* (2005). Until 2011, Odisha was known as Orissa, and the language, Odia, was called Oriya. As is very often the case, the name of the language was also the name of the speakers of the language and, by extension, their culture. "Odia" thus refers, as a noun, to the language itself, and, as an adjective, to both the language and the cultural identity of its native speakers.
3. Male writers were caught up in these changing attitudes as well. For example, of the dozen short stories published by Fakir Mohan Senapati, at least five have women's issues at their core.
4. This elliptical but devastating short short story has traditionally been credited to Ernest Hemingway, although the attribution is now widely considered apocryphal. See, for example, Josh Jones, "The (Urban) Legend of Ernest Hemingway's Six-Word Story: 'For Sale: Baby Shoes, Never Worn,'" *Open Culture*, 24 March 2015, <http://www.openculture.com/2015/03/the-urban-legend-of-ernest-hemingways-six-word-story.html>.
5. The *Purānas* (from the Sanskrit *purāna*, 'old') are compendia of legends, myths, histories, traditional teachings, and assorted other material. They were compiled over centuries, chiefly in Sanskrit, from ancient times through to the medieval period.
6. For an illustration of how translators read and render differently, see the fifty translations of a passage from Sei Shōnagon's *The Pillow Book* (*Makura no sōshi*) in Henitiuk (2012b).

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