

Comparability, Cognition, and Cultural Recreation: A Theoretical Reading of the Translation of Pahari Riddles

Meenakshi F. Paul* and Vishal Rangta**

Abstract

The act of translation transcends linguistic substitution to embrace cultural exchange and cognitive adaptation. This paper explores the translation of Pahari riddles collected through fieldwork in Shimla District, Himachal Pradesh, to examine the balance between equivalence and synthesis in translation. Riddles, as oral traditions, pose unique challenges due to their intrinsic duality, serving as both linguistic constructs and cultural artefacts. While traditional translation theories emphasise adequacy and equivalence, this study advocates for the latter, nuanced approach that foregrounds cultural embeddedness and integrates domestication and foreignization, which enables accessibility without overly compromising the source. Going beyond the equivalence analytical framework, this paper evaluates translation strategies in terms of their ability to maintain or adapt semantic, structural, and cultural elements while preserving the identity of culturally-rooted oral texts. A limitation of the study is the small sample size, which, although rich in complexity, may not comprehensively reflect the region's diverse riddle traditions. Key findings highlight that riddles inherently resist direct equivalence due to their reliance on cultural allusions and linguistic creativity. Consequently, effective translation requires a synthesis of strategies that maintain intelligibility while respecting the nuances of the source culture. The study emphasises that the structural nature of riddles defies standardised methods, necessitating a flexible, context-sensitive approach. The breaching of the equivalence framework offers critical insights into this adaptive process,

underlining the need to balance faithfulness to the source with relevance to the target audience. Ultimately, this work underscores the broader significance of translating oral traditions, advocating for a dynamic model in which riddles transform, not just transfer.

Keywords: Riddle, Cognitive adaptation, Equivalence, Synthesis, Cultural artefacts, Domestication, Foreignization

Introduction

Translation is not merely a linguistic activity but a complex act of interaction between cultures, modes of thought, and forms of expression. This is especially evident in the translation of oral literature, where the assimilation of language, performance, and socio-cultural context poses significant challenges to conventional strategies. The riddles in the Pahari dialect of the Shimla District serve as prime examples of oral texts that resist straightforward translation. Their form, function, and linguistic nuances are deeply rooted in local culture, prompting a deeper investigation into how meaning travels across languages and cultural boundaries.

This study employs a flexible strategy guided by translation theories of Eugene Nida's dynamic equivalence and Lawrence Venuti's concepts of domestication and foreignization; it is further informed by Sri Aurobindo's concept of cognition in translation and Rabindranath Tagore's idea of re-creation or transcreation. While Nida emphasises the receptor's response, Venuti highlights the translator's ethical responsibility to retain the "foreignness" of the source text (74). Domestication may risk erasing cultural distinctions, while foreignization maintains cultural markers that challenge and educate the reader.

Eugene Nida distinguishes two types of equivalences: formal and dynamic. Formal equivalence emphasises

* Professor, Department of English, HPU Department of Evening Studies, The Mall, Shimla, HP-171001. Can be reached at mfpaul.simla@gmail.com

** Assistant Professor of English, CoE, Govt. College Sanjauli, Shimla, HP-171001, Can be reached at ivishallwel@gmail.com

preserving both structure and meaning, akin to gloss translation, to help readers understand the context of the original language. In this method of translation, the source text is translated word-for-word into the target language, maintaining the original structure and order of words. This approach is often used for linguistic analysis or educational purposes, as it helps to preserve the grammatical and syntactical features of the source language. However, gloss translation may not produce a fluent or natural-sounding result in the target language, as its primary goal is to provide a literal representation rather than a meaning-rich or idiomatic one. This paper follows formal equivalence in its second step, where individual words of the source language text, Pahari, are translated into the target language text, English, though it neither captures the structure nor the meaning of the riddle in the original or receptor language. In contrast, dynamic equivalence, which Nida later renamed functional equivalence, focuses on producing the same impact on the new audience as the original did for its readers (Nida and Taber 12). It prioritises effect over form, making the message more natural and accessible. Formal equivalence has been borne in mind in the reconstruction of the Pahari riddles in English translations.

While foundational, Nida's theory has been critiqued for relying overly on the target audience's subjective response, risking loss of stylistic and cultural nuance (Mao and Wang 187). Moreover, focusing too much on making the text amenable to comprehension in the target language can weaken its cultural, historical, or literary accuracy, consequently reducing the depth of its cultural meaning, unique style, and connection to its original context. Literalists also argue that functionalist equivalence leans too far from the original, undermining accuracy. In translating Pahari riddles, strict formal equivalence often diminishes rhetorical impact, whereas trying to equate meanings in both languages can remove important cultural details and make the text emaciated. These and other issues reveal the imperative need for a balanced approach, which this study terms "Comparability, Cognition, and Cultural Recreation." This is a hybrid strategy with a multi-pronged approach integrating both forms of equivalence, blending fidelity to source and intelligibility for the reader, combining a judicious mix of domestication and foreignization, cognitive apprehension and adaptation, and cultural recreation and synthesis.

Three-Step Translation Process of Riddles

The riddles used in this study were collected through ethnographic fieldwork, including informal interviews and participatory observation. They cover themes such

as agriculture, animals, folk beliefs, and other aspects of local culture. Each riddle acts as a linguistic puzzle and a cultural artefact, with meaning rooted in metaphor, shared knowledge, and regional symbolism. An account of the collected riddles, followed by translation and a theoretical analysis of the translation process, is given below. The analysis highlights how each riddle moves through the three-step process—transcription, gloss, and recreation—and how it engages with diverse translation theories.

Riddles and English Translations

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|----|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|-----------|
| 1. | <i>Śāpaṛī</i> | <i>śan</i> | <i>ḍābarī</i> | <i>ḍan,</i> | <i>biatī</i> | <i>dā</i> |
| | Rock | warm | pool | lives, | wall | in |
| | <i>cōr</i> | <i>svargā</i> | <i>mōr.</i> | | | |
| | thief | heaven | peacock. | | | |

Who lives on the warm rock, who lives in the pool, who's the thief in the wall, who's heaven's peacock?

Answer: *Gōṛ* (Lizard), *Mimḍkā* (Frog), *Muśā* (Mouse), and Indra Dev (Lord Indra).

This riddle exemplifies an effective application of foreignization and dynamic equivalence. The translation preserves the metaphorical complexity and sequence of clues, offering the target reader the same playful interpretive challenge as the source audience. The use of poetic structure and repetition reflects a recreation strategy in Tagore's sense, prioritising cognitive resonance over direct equivalence as advocated by Sri Aurobindo. The inclusion of "heaven's peacock" to reference Indra Deva maintains the mystique and culturally rooted symbolism without overt explanation, aligning with Venuti's call for visible foreignness. The structural and symbolic logic of the original is retained substantially by achieving functional equivalence. At the same time, emphasis is laid on the layered identities of creatures across different settings.

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|----|---------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| 2. | <i>Ār</i> | <i>chalākā</i> | <i>pār</i> | <i>chalākā,</i> | <i>bic</i> |
| | Here | splashes | their | splash, | middle |
| | <i>nāliṃṃ</i> | <i>zāmṃṃ</i> | <i>pākā.</i> | | |
| | of the stream | rough lemon | ripe. | | |

Here a splash, there a splash, a rough lemon ripens in the middle of the stream.

Answer: *Makkhaṇ* (Churned butter).

This riddle presents a challenge in its cultural metaphor, as the image of "rough lemon" (*zāmṃṃ*) as a metaphor for *makkhaṇ* (churned butter) is not self-evident in English.

The translation retains the original imagery through foreignization and avoids domesticating the metaphor; however, there is a noticeable loss of rhythm in the second part of the translation. The interpretive burden is passed on to the reader, which reflects Aurobindo's cognitive model, emphasising reader participation in reconstructing meaning (Gupta and Deo 118). While the term "zāmṭū," for "rough lemon," might seem obscure, it aligns with the original's puzzling effect, thus achieving dynamic equivalence through experience rather than straightforward clarity. This translation resists over-explanation while preserving the folk logic and cognitive process embedded in the riddle.

3. Ṭēḍī- lakarī, bicau dā bhaurā ras,
mēḍī
Twisted wood, middle in fill juice,
jē nā būjhī mērī bajhainī, rūpayē
if no solve my riddle, rupee
lāgō das.
cost ten.

A twisted stick, filled with juice, it'll cost you ten rupees if you don't solve my clues.

Answer: *Jalēbī* (Jalebi).

This translation attempts to maintain the playful structure and rhyme of the original. "Juice" suggests a syrupy core, leading to the answer, *jalebi*. The monetary threat and the possibility of a *jalebi* treat with the penalty adds performative flair, invoking the element of folk performance in orality. The theoretical framework of this riddle merges dynamic equivalence or audience impact with transcreation or recreating experience. It also reflects Sri Aurobindo's 'truth-experience' by keeping the symbolic weight intact. The English translation of the riddle is adequate in performance terms, although literalists may feel the cultural reference is still veiled. That ambiguity, however, may be viewed as integral to the logic of the riddle form.

4. Pārau dā āī kāī kutī, tērē
Far from come black bitch, your
bā hāgā gōī sūtī.
father in front of has sleep.

A black bitch came from afar and went to sleep before your pa.

Answer: *Dārī-Mūmch* (Beard and moustache).

This riddle is rich in metaphor and ambiguity. The translated version preserves the provocative tone and

animal imagery, crucial to the playfulness and shock value of the original. The cognitive dissonance evoked by the description invites interpretive delay, which is central to the riddle tradition. Here, Tagore's concept of recreation is most visible: the riddle is not tamed or softened for the sake of clarity but retains its poetic mischief and suggestive surface. The decision to translate *kāī kutī* literally as "black bitch" employs a foreignising strategy and avoids euphemism. It also fulfils Nida's functional equivalence, as the emotional and humorous effect is preserved, even if the precise cultural coding may vary across contexts.

5. Aurī bhī ūm bhaurī bhī ūm,
Green is also full also am, middle
bic khētau dē khaurī bhī ūm.
field in the stand also am.

I am green, I am also full, and I stand in the field as well.

Answer: *Makkī* (Maize).

This riddle operates on a self-referential level and builds a metaphor grounded in agriculture. The translation adopts a literal but poetic strategy, maintaining the simplicity and declarative form of the original. This reflects dynamic equivalence in structure and tone, giving the target reader the same intuitive clues without excessive annotation. However, because "maize" may or may not carry the same centrality in Western cultural imagination as in Pahari contexts, the translation leans on cognitive equivalence, relying on the reader's reasoning to match qualities described to a known object (Ferreira and Schwieter 35). It walks a line between formal structure and reader-oriented effect, offering an adequate interpretive equivalent.

6. Dābē pāmdai, dābā dābē rā gāmv,
Box upon box, box of village,
cāldī-phirdī bastī lōē rā pāmv.
move village iron of foot.

Box upon box, boxes make a village, with feet of iron, a moving village.

Answer: *Rēlgārī* (Train).

Here, the image of a train is retained in its source form. This is a classic foreignising strategy (Venuti) and an act of transcreation (Tagore). It challenges the target reader to inhabit the source world's metaphor. The riddle is highly effective as it preserves both cognitive dissonance and cultural specificity, allowing the reader to "solve" the metaphor as one would in the original setting.

Another variant of the same riddle is used in this part of Himachal Pradesh in a completely different form. It substitutes the image of a village personified as a giant with iron feet with a more explicit chaotic image of a railway station when a train is about to leave. The changed evocative version is as follows:

Aurā dābā lāl dābā dābā o sarkārī,
The green box and red box are of the
government,
baiṭhṇī rī dumdām cālaṇī taiyārī.
rī
sit for clamour, go for ready.

Green box, red box, box of the government, a clamour to climb on, ready to set out.

Although the rhythm is broken in this rendering into English, nevertheless, it nevertheless maintains the excitement and impact of its earlier variant.

7. *Tīrī rī āū magīrī rī āū,*
Vent hole from come vent from come,
hole
ḍāg nī ausu māchāu khāū.
daag no is man eat.
(witch-like
entity)

I come from a vent hole, from yet another vent hole, a *ḍaag* I may not be, but men I eat.

Answer: *Danālī* (Double-barrelled gun).

The image of a gun turning into a monster that creeps in through a vent hole is notably preserved in the translation, without explicitly naming it. This transformation aligns well with foreignization, functional equivalence, which captures the same psychological tension, and cognitive adaptation, allowing the reader to actively piece together the intended meaning. As proposed by Ferreira and Schwieter, the translators here play the role of cognitive interpreters (35), helping reconstruct layers of meaning. Although there is a loss of rhythm in English, the approach works sufficiently, especially in preserving the tone, depth of the metaphor, and imaginative logic, hopefully allowing it to resonate effectively with the reader.

8. *Uṛkaṇu-śurkaṇu cārē cakāṇ, pīṭhī dī aurkanī kaiṛī*
Fly four legs, back at the back of the
elbow, neck
dē kān.
on ear.

It flies and rests on all four legs, its elbows point back, and it has ears on its neck.

Answer: *Thaḍā* (Grasshopper).

This riddle is intensely visual, relying on descriptive anatomy to deceive and amuse. The translation attempts to render these features, sustaining the dynamic energy and observational tone of the Pahari riddle. The onomatopoeic verbs *uṛkaṇu-śurkaṇu* are, however, approximated by “flies and rests,” a poetic compromise that deviates from the original rhythm without literal replication. This compromise is typical of transcreation, which maintains functional and stylistic equivalence rather than phonological fidelity. The anatomical inversion, elbows pointing back, and ears on the neck invite cognitive decoding, aligning with Sri Aurobindo’s notion of recreating inner experience. The translation captures the riddle’s absurd anatomical logic, its humour and strangeness, enhancing its poetic and mnemonic appeal. This riddle appears in another variant with a minor difference, where the initial two words are replaced by ‘*acakaṇ-macakaṇ*’ and ‘*aurkanī*’ is substituted by ‘*aurkan*,’ which further contributes to the linguistic diversity of the region of the study.

9. *Māṭhō jō guganu, bauṛō jō pēṭ,*
Little is the oil big is the
lamp, stomach,
cāl mērō guganu Maṇḍī-Skēt.
come my oil lamp the erstwhile princely
states of Mandi and
Suket.

Little is the oil lamp, its belly is great, let’s go with my oil lamp to Mandi-Suket.

Answer: *Dhūm* (Smoke).

The translation of this riddle invites an interpretive approach through dynamic equivalence, as proposed by Eugene Nida. The metaphor of a small oil lamp producing abundant smoke that travels to the distant lands of “Mandi-Suket” foregrounds a cultural image that cannot be understood literally outside its source context. Dynamic equivalence allows for the preservation of the intended communicative effect by retaining the poetic exaggeration and symbolic spatial reference. Lawrence Venuti’s theory of foreignization is particularly relevant here, as terms like “Mandi-Suket” cannot be domesticated or replaced with familiar referents from the target culture; rather, they maintain the cultural embeddedness of the riddle. This visible cultural marker validates Venuti’s emphasis on resisting domestication in

translation. The poetic translation maintains the rhythm and surprise of the original, emphasising transcreation to recreate mood and imagery.

10. <i>Ūpar</i>	<i>bēl,</i>	<i>buīm</i>	<i>thāvāīm,</i>	<i>āmā</i>
Up	creeper,	below	ground,	mother
<i>gōrī,</i>	<i>put</i>	<i>śāvāīm.</i>		
fair,	son	dark.		

Vine above, ground below, mother fair, son dark.

Answer: *Magō* (obscure, unverified name) or *Daregal* (probable name; Air Yam).

This riddle is visually simple but metaphorically rich, employing natural imagery to convey a relationship between the visible creeper and the hidden root tuber. Nida's formal equivalence can be maintained to an extent, since the structure and surface meaning are accessible cross-culturally. However, dynamic equivalence becomes essential to highlight the metaphorical role of the mother and son, where the mother is the creeper and the son is the dark tuber root growing deep inside the soil. The translation resists domestication in Venuti's sense, leaving the metaphoric structure intact. It does not substitute the image with more familiar flora; rather, it foreignises the reader's experience, maintaining the cultural origin of the imagery. Sri Aurobindo's cognitive theory is evoked in the symbolic association between visibility and identity; what is seen is not necessarily the origin. Tagore's notion of transcreation supports the translation of the metaphor in a poetic mode, emphasising the philosophical and emotional layers embedded in a seemingly simple description of a plant.

This riddle was encountered in the Junga Tehsil, but arguably, the dialect in which it is rendered is not the dialect of the area, which suggests that this riddle has migrated to the region, probably by way of either marriage or through trade and travel. The words such as "*buīm*," "*thāvāīm*," "*āmā*," "*put*," and "*śāvāīm*" resemble the Kehluri dialect spoken mainly in Bilaspur District and some parts of Solan District of Himachal Pradesh, suggesting that the riddle might have travelled to Junga Tehsil of Shimla District. The ambiguity of the riddle also translates to its answer, which is equally uncertain. The informant provided the answer to the riddle as "*magō*," whereas further investigation yielded a blank, and the name was not found anywhere else. The description of *magō* vegetable provided by the informant was cross-checked with multiple informants from Solan and Bilaspur Districts, and it was revealed that the description resembles *daregal* (air yam), and to an extent,

taradi (Himalayan yam). The word *magō*, however, was not found among the speakers in the region.

11. <i>Pōrau</i>	<i>āē</i>	<i>ḍimḡaḷī</i>	<i>ḍaumṭhī,</i>
From there	comes	stick	thick,
<i>maumyai</i>	<i>zāṇḍ</i>	<i>zimḍarī</i>	<i>nauṭhī.</i>
I	know	life	run away.

From there, a thick stick came my way, and I knew my life would run away.

Answer: *Sāmp* (Snake).

The riddle's sudden shift from a seemingly ordinary image, a stick, to a life-threatening recognition of a snake is made possible through direct translation, which allows the translator to prioritise the effect of fear, urgency, and recognition. The metaphor of a "thick stick" triggers cognitive shock, and does not diminish the riddle's tension; instead, foreignization preserves its suspense and ambiguity. From a cognitive perspective, the riddle captures a moment of instinctive realisation, the transformation of perception that sparks an intuitive reaction to evoke the same sudden jolt of comprehension and fear. The metaphor maintains the poetic surprise and logic inherent in the original.

12. <i>Battī</i>	<i>kuṭṭaṇ</i>	<i>kuṭadai</i>	<i>lāgai,</i>	<i>piṅgaḷā</i>
Thirty-two	pounder	pound	start,	pink
<i>rāṇī</i>	<i>nācadē</i>	<i>lāgī,</i>	<i>bhubar</i>	<i>miyām</i>
queen	dance	start,	mouth,	mister
<i>guṭadā</i>	<i>lāgā.</i>			
swallow	start.			

Thirty-two Pounders began to pound, Pink Queen began to dance, and Mister Mouth began to swallow.

Answer: *Rōṭī khāṇī* (Eating) involving *Dāmd* (Teeth), *Zīb* (Tongue), *Mūmh* (Mouth).

This riddle exemplifies a highly metaphorical mode of expression, representing the process of eating through personified imagery. Nida's dynamic equivalence is crucial to conveying the poetic and bodily metaphors; the thirty-two pounders signify teeth, the pink queen is the tongue, and the mouth becomes a theatrical stage. The original Pahari terms are rich in connotation, and it is important to retain their flavour, particularly the regal metaphor for the tongue, as taste rules the function of eating. The translation avoids domestication, preserving the metaphorical logic while relying on the reader to make conceptual links. Tagore's idea of transcreation is

indispensable in translating this riddle to maintain its colour, rhythm, and dramatic spirit. The translator must become a performer, mirroring the playful narrative that unfolds in the riddle's sequence.

13. <i>Ārau</i>	<i>bhī</i>	<i>dhār</i>	<i>pārau</i>	<i>dhār, bic</i>	<i>nāī</i>
			<i>bhī</i>		
This side	also	hill	that	middle	in
			side	river	
			hill,		
<i>dū bērau</i>	<i>rō</i>	<i>thāc.</i>			
sheep	of	highland			
		pasture.			

Hills to this side, hills to that side, in the middle of the river, there are sheep in the pasture.

Answer: *Sīrē* (Also known as *siddu* in other tehsils).

This riddle employs geographical imagery to depict a local dish, *sīrē* (or *siddu*), and the traditional method of cooking it. *Sīrē* are made of fermented wheat flour and stuffed with lentils. They are steamed and served with ghee and chutney. Metaphorically likened to a mountainscape, *sīrē* are described thus: the sides of the steaming vessel are the hills surrounding the valley, water for steaming is the river, the blades of grass and leaves placed on the water represent the pasture, and the *sīrē* placed on it are the sheep. Cognitively, the riddle represents food through visual-spatial metaphors, echoing Aurobindo's idea of perception as symbolic cognition. *Siddu*, as a microcosm of the Himachali landscape, offers readers a cultural and sensory bridge into local life, which carries significant regional culinary value. Foreignisation here does not lead to cultural loss as the geographic-food metaphor unique to the region is not erased in the translated riddle. The metaphor's elegance balances food, geography, and poetic insight.

This riddle is also found in the Junga Tehsil with minor differences. The words *ārau*, *pārau*, and *dhār* are replaced by *āṁḍkū*, *pāṁḍkū*, and *ḍhāk*, respectively:

Āṁḍkū ḍhāk pāṁḍkū ḍhāk, bic nāīyē bhēḍrū thāc.

14. <i>Khāṭū</i>	<i>kacaumbalū</i>	<i>kaurū</i>	<i>kaśbāī,</i>	<i>tūai</i>
Sour,	pungent,	bitter,	astrin-	you,
			gent,	
<i>kyō</i>	<i>jhāṁgū ām</i>	<i>rājai</i>	<i>rū</i>	<i>sipāhī?</i>
why	attack me,	king	of	soldier?
<i>Thiskē</i>	<i>nākai</i>	<i>pacauūlē</i>	<i>murṁhai</i>	<i>murṁhai</i>
Snub	nose	sunken	face,	I

<i>kyā</i>	<i>zāṅuui</i>	<i>ki</i>	<i>ai</i>	<i>tiyā</i>
how	know	that	here	was
<i>tūai?</i>				
you?				

You are sour, pungent, bitter, and astringent. why did you attack me? I am the king's soldier.

You have a snub nose and a sunken face. how was I to know that you were here?

Answer: *Ārū* (Peach) and *Mimḍkā* (Frog).

This riddle is a miniature folk drama, structured around a dialogic exchange between two characters—a frog and a peach. The translation here draws heavily on Tagore's concept of transcreation, as it seeks not merely to transfer meaning but to reanimate the emotional and performative life of the riddle in the target language. Rather than making the exchange dull and converting it into explanatory prose, the translation preserves the voice, tone, and conflict embedded in the original. The emotional vibrancy of the frog's grievance and the peach's defence is retained through dynamic equivalence by the deliberate use of colloquial expressions and pacing, offering the reader an experience akin to that of a native listener. The effect on the target audience approximates that of the source audience through an analogous experiential character. Terms like "sour, bitter, and astringent" evoke a sensory profile familiar to Indian palates. Likewise, the mention of "the king's soldier" allows the folk register and social imagination of the source culture to remain visible. The translation reflects a cognitive equivalence approach, encouraging the reader to reconstruct meaning from embedded metaphors, local references, and the dramatic turn of events. The translation moves between fidelity and creativity, using functional equivalence to preserve the dramatic liveliness and cultural nuance of this animated folk encounter.

Conclusion

The riddles discussed above have been transcribed using the Roman Script with ISO 15919 diacritics to maintain phonetic integrity. This marks the first layer of translation—capturing sound to preserve the oral identity of the riddles. It is not just phonological fidelity but cultural encoding, as argued by Nida in his paper titled "Principles of Correspondence," in which he emphasised that form and content are inseparable in a message (156).

The second step involved a word-for-word gloss into English. For example, "*lāl ḍābā*" becomes "red box" and "*cāldī-phirdī bastī*" becomes "moving village." This step helps preserve the semantic structure, but it is often not

so satisfactory and is insufficient on its own, as it fails to capture and interpret the local meaning of the Pahari riddle. As A. K. Ramanujan suggests, the literal often fails to account for embedded cultural meanings and poetic resonance (qtd. in Dharwadker 296).

In the final stage, the riddles are creatively rearticulated in English while respecting their rhythmic and metaphorical logic. Nida's theory of functional equivalence is crucial here, as the process of translating was also done for effect and not merely for form. However, the riddles resist any singular equivalence. For instance, the metaphor of a "dāg" (a kind of human-eating witch) loses poetic charm and cultural resonance if replaced by its English equivalent, "witch." The word *dāg* also forms the implicit referent and leads to the answer of the riddle. Here, Venuti's foreignization serves as a corrective by encouraging retention of such imagery to foreground cultural specificity (Venuti 75). In this stage, the riddles are rewritten in idiomatic, evocative English to retain the riddle-ness of the riddles by foregrounding brevity, rhythm, ambiguity, and play.

The act of translating thus becomes dialogic. As Sri Aurobindo argued, language is an expression of consciousness, and translation must preserve the "truth-experience" of the "original." This aligns with Tagore's idea of transcreation—an intuitive recreation that values resonance over replication. If a riddle refers to "*bichubuti*" (stinging nettle), its English rendering should evoke not just the plant but its cultural function as a common folk remedy or disciplinary tool. The translator is not just a conveyor of meaning but an interpreter who reconstructs it for the target audience. This model validates a "performative" translation, where riddles are not merely encoded in a new language but reborn through cultural and cognitive adaptation.

The translation of Pahari riddles through the framework of comparability, cognition, and cultural recreation demonstrates a well-balanced and theoretically informed process. At the phonetic level, the use of standard diacritics for Roman transcription ensures strong fidelity to the original sounds, preserving the oral-aural rhythm and local identity of the riddles. The semantic clarity achieved in the word-for-word gloss stage is analytically sound, offering foundational insight into the literal structure of the riddles; however, this stage alone does not capture the performative or poetic dimension essential to the riddle tradition. The poetic recreation stage compensates for this by effectively preserving cultural embeddedness through metaphor, rhythm, and symbolic imagery, key traits that align with Venuti's advocacy for foreignization and Tagore's idea of emotional resonance over literal fidelity. The poetic impact in English, then, mirrors the cognitive and emotional effect intended in the original

Pahari, fulfilling Nida's dynamic equivalence through reader engagement and interpretive intrigue.

Importantly, the translator's interpretive agency is made visible, a conscious departure from the traditional invisibility of the translator. This visibility not only validates Venuti's ethical model but also underscores the translator's role as a cultural mediator. The translation approach invites the reader to engage in active meaning-making, a practice that reflects both Aurobindo's cognitive orientation and Ferreira and Schwieter's model of the translator as an interpreter of culturally-situated cognition. In balancing fidelity to the original text with accessibility for the target audience, the approach avoids over-domestication while remaining intelligible. Overall, this hybrid strategy proves adaptive, context-sensitive, and ethically grounded, reflecting a nuanced engagement with multiple translation theories while remaining responsive to the unique structural and cultural demands of riddles.

The translation of Pahari riddles reflects a nuanced practice that goes beyond traditional notions of equivalence, engaging multiple theoretical perspectives to navigate the complexity of culturally embedded oral texts. Rather than aiming for replication, the process produces a transformed version that captures the essence, tone, and imaginative spirit of the original. By moving between formal accuracy and dynamic resonance, and by carefully negotiating between foreignization and transcreation, the translator enables the riddles to resonate meaningfully within a new linguistic and cultural context. Though the study draws on a limited yet rich selection of riddles, it offers valuable insights into the challenges of translating oral literature. The inherent tension between linguistic precision and cultural integrity calls for an approach that is both adaptive and interpretive. The hybrid framework thus affirms that effective translation is less about rigid adherence to models and more about responsive engagement shaped by the demands of the text, the expectations of the audience, and the translator's creative judgement.

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Sacred Landscape: Unveiling the Changing Contours of Indigenous Beliefs in Select Himachali Short Stories

Gitanjali Mahendra*

Abstract

The Pahari community residing in the abode of the Gods, Himachal Pradesh, known as 'Dev Bhoomi', has its local deities called Devi and Devta. These deities are believed to be manifestations of Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh, originating from the very roots of nature. The Devi/Devta hold strong dominance over the Pahari community, governing their social customs, activities, and destinies. It is believed that the Gods control their lives, and what they say cannot be disobeyed at any cost. The religious beliefs that play a central role in the community also impart livelihood to the Pahari people. However, the impact of new knowledge, personal experiences, and liberal attitudes has led to changes in indigenous beliefs among the Pahari people. This paper attempts to study two Himachali short stories, "Legacies" by Ratan S. Himesh and "Manglachari" by Sunder Lohia, translated by Prof. Meenakshi F. Paul in *Short Stories of Himachal Pradesh* (2007). These stories capture the linkages between resident deities and their underlying impact on the socio-cultural fabric of the region. The paper aims to unveil the aspects of the governing power of the Devi/Devta and their relevance in contemporary times. Both stories illustrate the mystical nature of the control of Devtas, which plays a pivotal role in influencing the lives of the residents. The Devta communicates through the medium of a devised oracle, the gur. The stories highlight the ancient belief system of the Himalayan state.

Keywords: *Devi/devta*, Resident deities, Religious Beliefs, Belief System, *Gur*.

Introduction

The Devi/Devta system traces its origin back to the Rigvedic period (1500-1000 BC). They are considered divine manifestations of Gods, with each region having its deity, the guardian who oversees local affairs. A village Devi/Devta is regarded as the ruler who owns the land, and people conduct their lives according to the Devi/Devta's will, seeking consent from the presiding deity before undertaking any task (Malhotra 2010). An intricate system of beliefs, myths, rituals, and folklore is practised by the Pahari community, contributing to biases and rigidities associated with these practices and belief systems. The community has established a close relationship with the divine power by either controlling or overpowering the spirit through enchantments or techniques, channelling the power for good or bad, and acquiring desired objects (Lowie 176). The short stories set in Himachal reflect the deep-rooted belief system associated with the Devta institution, both in faith and practice.

As stated by B.R Sharma, the institution of the Devi / Devtas has not come up suddenly; it has a long tradition, and one cannot ascertain when it emerged.

"The village Gods control all the villagers and direct social customs. When this custom of village deities started is not known for certain, but the villagers know only that their activities and destinies are governed by these Gods and they cannot afford to disobey them at any cost. Thus, it can be safely said that this institution is the major dictator of their activities, hopes and despairs, virtues, and vices, natural and created misfortunes in a village society. The village God is a symbol of village culture". (Sharma 33)

Numerous writers from Himachal Pradesh, such as S.R. Harnot, Sunder Lohia, Piyuh Guleri, Naresh Pandit, Tulsi Raman, Sadhu Ram Darshak, Suhil Kumar Phull, and

* Associate Professor, Department of English, St. Bede's College, Shimla. Can be reached at gitanjali.mahendra@gmail.com

Badri Singh Bhatia, write in Pahari and Hindi languages. This paper aims to establish the intertwining of the Devta influence with the socio-cultural fabric of the region in the two stories. The narratives mirror the folk beliefs that constitute the rituals, legends, and myths of the society. The ceremonies associated with the Devi/Devta conform to the collective consciousness of the people. As B.L. Kapoor notes, "The culture is somewhat mysterious. It is difficult to expose all its layers and decode their meanings" (Kapoor 64).

Myths reflect cultural values and beliefs and are concerned with the motives that underlie human behaviour. This approach of studying the mythological and archetypal critical approaches allows for an examination of how ancient myths and beliefs shape contemporary narratives, particularly in the context of the Pahari community's relationship with their deities. Myths serve as a lens through which we can understand the characters' motivations, societal norms, and the overarching themes of fate, divine intervention, and human agency. As Mark Schorer says, "Myth is fundamental, the dramatic representation of our deepest instinctual life, of a primary awareness of man in the universe, capable of many configurations, upon which all particular opinions and attitudes depend". (Schorer 29)

In the context of the stories "Manglachari" and "Legacies," it is revealed how the Devi/Devta system functions as both a source of guidance and a mechanism of control. The narratives illustrate the duality of these myths, where the divine is both a protector and a potential oppressor, shaping the lives of individuals within the community.

"Manglachari"

The author of the story "Maglachari" is Prof. Sunder Lohia, born in the year 1933. He is a renowned short story writer and poet. His works are regularly published in noted Hindi magazines of India, *Sarika*, *Saptahik*, *Hindustan and Hans*, and his works have also been translated into Marathi, Gujarati, and Punjabi. He has authored 'Nai Kahani', a book of short stories and a book of poems, 'Ek Asiwkar'.

The story "Manglachari" is rich with mythological elements that emphasise the cultural significance of the Devi/Devta system. Trinal Mahadev is the protective deity, while the *gur* serves as the intermediary between the divine and the mortal realm. This relationship symbolises the broader mythological framework in which the Pahari community operates, where the divine is intricately woven into the fabric of daily life.

The story unfolds in the sacred realm of the Trinal Mahadev temple, where the deity resides, and a vibrant

fair is held every spring. This annual celebration draws the community together, with folk dances and lively performances filling the open courtyard, where the air is alive with the sounds of traditional instruments. As Singh notes, "Like all hill people, the inhabitants of Himachal Pradesh have to put in a bitter struggle to make their living, and like all hill people, they forget their hard life in laughter and songs" (Singh 45)

Among the performers are two close friends, Phuhnu and Runiya, who play the shehnai and nagara, the kettle drum, with infectious enthusiasm, embodying the spirit of the festival as true *manglacharis*. Phuhnu, obsessed with thoughts of the fair, composes new melodies and rehearses them months in advance.

Phuhnu's life takes a tragic turn when his beloved wife, Rukmo, falls gravely ill. Overwhelmed by grief, he finds himself unable to play the shehnai, the instrument that once brought him joy. In his darkest hour, Runiya encourages him to attend the fair, believing that the Devta would be displeased if they did not honour the tradition. Runiya insists that the Devta, whom Phuhnu has faithfully served throughout his life, would surely lend his divine assistance and perhaps even cure Rukmo.

"Right from the origin or manifestation of a particular god or goddess, the *gur* (medium) or the interpreter of the Devta, relates the whole story with his supernatural powers, miracles and capability of curses inflicted by him, from time to time. The medium, while in trance and possession by the spirit, turns out to be an oracle or God himself. Whatever he utters in the state of trance is believed to be the assertion of God himself". (Sharma 13).

Rukmo, too, expresses her desire for Phuhnu to seek counsel of the *gur*, hoping for a remedy to her suffering. When Phuhnu approaches the *gur*, he receives a glimmer of hope: "Listen, Manglachari! The planets are currently inauspicious for your wife. Take this holy thread and water. She will recover in fifteen days. Go, this is my blessing". Phuhnu clings to this promise, convinced that his unwavering devotion to the Devta will yield a miracle.

The *gur* provides Phuhnu with an auspicious thread and water, assuring him of her recovery in fifteen days. When he returns home, he follows the *gur's* instructions and gives Rukmo the auspicious thread and water. The next morning, he finds her dead, and his faith in the Devta is shattered. A wave of resentment washes over him as he grapples with the betrayal of his faith: "What had become of her faith? What return had I received for my years of service?" (Lohia 58)

The following year, Phuhnu returns to the mela, but the joy of the festival eludes him. He cannot bring himself to play the shehnai, leaving it turned upside down, a symbol of his broken spirit. When the temple steward

urges him to perform, Phuhnu's indifference is palpable. "How did the blessing given to me turn into a curse?" he laments. "He could not even keep His promise for fifteen days. At least ask Him... What wrong did I" (Lohia 61)

Phuhnu was becoming restless, he wanted to know what wrong he had done that the Devta cursed him and he lost his wife. He was told by the *bhandari* that birth and death do happen. His words of wisdom could not console Phuhnu; he refused to play the shehnai. The cultural practice of showing temporary empathy fades when personal duty is not fulfilled. The crowd is unsympathetic; they thrash him and demand that Phuhnu leave, declaring that one who does not serve the Devta has no place in the temple. Runiya, steadfast in his loyalty to his friend, refuses to play the nagara without Phuhnu's shehnai, stating, "The nagara is dumb without the shehnai, master. I won't play". (Lohia 62)

When Runiya supports Phuhnu, the bond of friendship shines brighter than any divine promise, reminding them both that human connection can often provide solace where faith falters. As they descend the slope, Phuhnu turns to Runiya, gratitude mingling with sorrow in his voice. "Runiya, you saved my honour today. A man is better than the Devta; at least he understands the anguish of a person". (Lohia 62). His statement effectively captures the essence of the narrative's critique of divine authority, highlighting a significant shift towards prioritising human connection and empathy over unquestioning faith. In the story, the Devta, once a symbol of comfort and guidance for Phuhnu, transforms into a source of disillusionment and conflict. This evolution highlights the complexities of faith and the often-painful realities of the human experience.

Phuhnu's journey illustrates the struggle between adhering to tradition and seeking his friend's support in the face of suffering. His unwavering devotion to the Devta, which once provided him with a sense of purpose, ultimately leads to profound disappointment when his faith does not yield the expected solace or healing for his wife. This disillusionment prompts him to reconsider the nature of his beliefs and the role of divine authority in his life.

The narrative poignantly reflects the tension between established traditions and the individual's quest for understanding and connection. Phuhnu's reliance on the Devta for healing reflects the deep-rooted belief in divine intervention. His despair after his wife's death and the inability to question the Devta highlight the emotional weight of these myths. As Phuhnu grapples with his grief and resentment, he finds solace not in the divine but in the unwavering support of his friend Runiya. This shift emphasises the importance of human relationships and the shared understanding of pain.

"Man is at present at the juncture when he is looking at myths, rituals and folklore with a confused vision: accepting their worth yet refusing to see rationality behind them". (Bande 177)

"Legacies"

Ratan S. Himesh is a renowned satirist, short-story writer, and playwright. He writes columns under the pseudonym "*Thagde Da Ragda*". He has five short story collections and twelve plays to his credit.

In the story "Legacies" by Ratan S. Himesh, Sumana narrates the myth of how Kumla Devta was stealing trees from the gardens of Bishala Devta. Upon discovering the theft, Bishala Devta rained down hailstones on Kumla Devta, resulting in a cut nose. The idol of Kumla Devta bears this mark, and attempts by a goldsmith to fix it are futile. The narrator recalls hearing this story as a child, noting the physical evidence of the tale in the landscape.

"For Proof, there were these umbrella-shaped trees and rocks pockmarked with iron hailstones. And also, the Devta with his nose missing. There was no room for any doubt. Still, I never did believe this tale". (Himesh 134).

The narrator's first encounter with Sumana, a married woman, occurs when she is tending to her animals in the forest. He observes her struggling to separate two bulls that are fighting—one belonging to him and the other to her. This moment is charged with nostalgia, as he reflects on having seen her as a child when she married at the tender age of ten or twelve. In his attempt to break up the fight, he injures his hand with a stick, a physical manifestation of the emotional turmoil that will unfold between them. Their subsequent meetings spark a rare vitality in their connection, hinting at the deep bond that has formed over the years.

The arrival of the Kariyala troop brings a festive atmosphere to the village, but for Sumana, it is a source of dread. Accompanied by her husband, Narayan Das, she wears an expression of fear. When Narayan falls asleep during the performance, Sumana urgently warns the author, "These people have come to attack you; they will kill you". (Himesh 140). Recognising the gravity of her warning, the author decides to leave to address the situation. It becomes clear that Narayan Das has been abusive, having thrashed Sumana to the point where she could barely move. This incident propels her to leave him, returning to her parents' home with a determination never to return.

As Sumana and the author grow closer, they begin to contemplate their future together. "Listen, have you ever considered what will become of us?" the author asks, filled with hope. However, Sumana's heart is heavy with the weight of tradition and societal expectations. She

expresses her fears about their potential union, stating, "How could a girl from Kumla Devta's area ever become part of your home? It would bring ruin to the family. Destruction and catastrophe would follow". (Himesh 142). Despite having divorced Narayan Das, Sumana feels trapped by the cultural boundaries that define her existence. "You don't understand", she insists. "Bishla Devta will never accept me in his area. Then what will I gain from marrying you?" (Himesh 142). The author's attempts to persuade her are met with resistance, as Sumana conveys the profound stigma she carries. "I would never marry anyone", she declares, "I have the stigma of your name branded on my forehead and your image engraved in my heart". (Himesh 142)

The Devtas pose an obstacle to their union, as Sumana fears the consequences of offending the deity. The narrator argues that her decision is based on superstition, highlighting the tension between personal desire and adherence to traditional beliefs. The story illustrates how folklore remains a dynamic dialogue with life, reflecting the collective memory of society.

"Folklore is not only a continuous process of creation, it remains in a dynamic dialogic relationship with life, with the past and the present, and becomes the projection of the innermost recesses of the social psyche, representing the collective memory of the whole society". (Bande 36).

Sumana's ultimate decision not to marry the narrator, despite her feelings, shows the power of tradition and the fear of divine retribution, illustrating the complexities of navigating personal desires within the constraints of cultural expectations.

The myth of the Kumla and Bishala Devtas serves as a backdrop for the characters' struggles, emphasising how deeply ingrained beliefs can dictate personal relationships and societal norms. The narrative suggests that while these myths provide a framework for understanding the world, they can also impose limitations on an individual's happiness.

The story employs various mythological elements that highlight the cultural significance of the Devi/Devta system. The conflict between Kumla and Bishala Devtas serves as a metaphor for the rivalries and tensions that exist within the community. This mythological backdrop not only enriches the narrative but also reinforces the idea that the divine is intricately linked to the social fabric of the Pahari people. In his book *The Divine Heads*, B.R. Sharma points out:

"The myths relating to folk beliefs, folk tales, rituals, and village gods provide essential data for interpretations of the social mind of a particular society. The primitive myths are not isolated in their character and have a definite bearing on the lifestyle of the people where these are prevalent". (Sharma 91)

The physical scars on the idol of Kumla Devta symbolise the lasting impact of divine conflict on the community. This motif of scars as a representation of unresolved tensions is a common theme in mythology, where the past continues to influence the present. Sumana's struggle to reconcile her feelings for the narrator with her fear of divine retribution reflects the broader theme of individual desires clashing with societal expectations, a recurring motif in mythological narratives.

As the Pahari community navigates the complexities of modernity, the stories reveal a gradual shift in the perception of the Devi/Devta. While the reverence for these deities remains, there is an emerging dialogue that questions their omnipotence and the rigid structures of belief that have governed the community for centuries. The characters in these narratives embody this struggle, reflecting a broader societal shift towards individualism and critical thinking.

The Changing Contours of Indigenous Beliefs

In "Manglachari," Phuhnu's disillusionment with the Devta after his wife's death signifies a turning point in his relationship with the divine. His desire to question the Devta's authority marks a departure from traditional beliefs, suggesting that the community is beginning to grapple with the limitations of faith in the face of personal tragedy. This shift is indicative of a larger trend within the Pahari community, where the younger generation is increasingly influenced by modern ideologies and scientific reasoning.

Similarly, Sumana's internal conflict in "Legacies" highlights the tension between personal desires and the constraints imposed by tradition. Her decision to forgo love for the sake of appeasing the deity reveals the deep-rooted fear of divine retribution that permeates the community. This fear is not merely a relic of the past but continues to shape the lives of individuals, dictating their choices and actions. Through this narrative, Himesh delves into themes of love, tradition, and identity, illustrating the complexities faced by individuals caught between their desires and societal constraints. Sumana's struggle reflects the harsh realities of cultural expectations, leaving her torn between her feelings for the author and the fear of the repercussions that their union might bring. Their relationship, filled with longing and unfulfilled potential, serves as a powerful reminder of the challenges that arise when love confronts the weight of legacy and tradition.

The impact of education and exposure to new ideas plays a significant role in shaping the beliefs of the Pahari community. As the younger generation becomes more educated, they are increasingly questioning the validity of traditional beliefs and practices. This shift is evident in

the narratives of “Manglachari” and “Legacies,” where characters grapple with the implications of their faith in the face of modern realities.

Phuhnu’s struggle with the Devta’s authority reflects a growing scepticism towards established religious practices. His desire to question the Devta’s decisions signifies a departure from blind faith, suggesting that the community is beginning to embrace a more critical approach to their beliefs. This scepticism is further emphasised by Runiya’s support for Phunnu, indicating a shift towards valuing human empathy and understanding over divine authority.

In “Legacies,” Sumana’s internal conflict regarding her marriage to the narrator highlights the clash between personal desires and societal expectations rooted in ancient beliefs. The fear of divine retribution serves as a metaphor for the constraints imposed by tradition, illustrating how postcolonial societies often navigate the complexities of identity and belief in a rapidly changing world.

Conclusion

The exploration of indigenous beliefs in Himachali short stories reveals a dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity. The narratives of “Manglachari” and “Legacies” not only preserve the rich cultural heritage of the Pahari community but also serve as a commentary on the evolving nature of belief systems in the face of changing societal values. As the community grapples

with the implications of new knowledge and experiences, the sacred landscape of Himachal Pradesh continues to transform, reflecting the resilience and adaptability of its people. The stories ultimately invite readers to reflect on the complexities of faith, identity, and the human experience and relationships in a rapidly changing world.

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