

Cultural Translation in Practice: Domestication and Foreignization in the English
Translation of Bano Qudsia's *Raja Gidh*

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ABSTRACT

This research article explores the translation strategies of domestication and foreignization in the English translation of Raja Gidh, a culturally rich Urdu novel by Bano Qudsia. Employing a qualitative, comparative textual analysis, the study examines how culturally specific elements—such as religious terms, idioms, and food references—are rendered in the target language. The analysis is framed within the theoretical perspectives of Venuti's (1995) translation strategies and Bhabha's (1994) concept of cultural hybridity. The findings reveal a predominant reliance on domestication, which enhances readability for the target audience but results in a dilution of cultural and ideological nuance. However, selective use of foreignization suggests an attempt to preserve source culture specificity in certain contexts. The study concludes that while domestication facilitates accessibility, a more balanced approach integrating foreignization would better reflect the source text's cultural richness. The research contributes to the ongoing discourse on cultural translation and highlights the ideological implications embedded in translation practices.

Keywords: Cultural Translation, Domestication and Foreignization, Raja Gidh, Translation Strategies, Bano Qudsia, Cultural Hybridity

INTRODUCTION

Translation is not a mere act of transferring words from one language into another; it is a profound cultural activity that involves the negotiation of meaning between different sociocultural and linguistic systems. In literary translation especially, the challenge is twofold: preserving the aesthetic and emotional integrity of the original work while rendering it comprehensible and relatable for a different readership. This complexity becomes even more pronounced when translating culturally rich texts like *Raja Gidh*—a landmark Urdu novel written by the esteemed Pakistani author Bano Qudsia. Known for its deep psychological insights, spiritual undercurrents, and cultural intricacies, *Raja Gidh* provides a compelling case for exploring the tensions and choices inherent in cultural translation.

Bano Qudsia's *Raja Gidh*, first published in 1981, is a powerful literary exploration of ethical decay, spiritual crisis, and the philosophical consequences of violating divine laws, primarily through the lens of socio-cultural values in Pakistani society. The novel interweaves themes of forbidden love, madness, death, and divine justice within the matrix of Islamic belief and South Asian cultural norms. Its prose is

deeply embedded in local idioms, cultural metaphors, religious references, and socio-political commentary that represent the values and psyche of a postcolonial Muslim society. Translating such a text into English, therefore, is not just a linguistic undertaking—it is a cultural negotiation where the translator must constantly decide between strategies that domesticate the content for target readers or foreignize it to retain its original flavor.

In the broader field of translation studies, the dichotomy between domestication and foreignization was brought to prominence by Lawrence Venuti (1995), who argued that domestication tends to erase the cultural specificity of the source text, while foreignization resists assimilation and preserves the "otherness" of the original culture. Friedrich Schleiermacher, as early as 1813, had already suggested that translators must choose either to bring the reader to the author (foreignization) or bring the author to the reader (domestication). This debate remains highly relevant in the context of South Asian literature in translation, where local values, religious nuances, and historical legacies demand sensitive and contextually aware translation strategies.

In the English translation of *Raja Gidh*, a variety of cultural markers pose significant translation challenges—ranging from Islamic terminology and metaphysical concepts to food items, traditional customs, and context-specific idiomatic expressions. These elements not only structure the narrative but also shape the reader's understanding of the socio-religious fabric in which the story unfolds. A translator's decision to domesticate or foreignize such elements significantly affects how the target audience perceives the source culture, thereby influencing cross-cultural understanding or misrepresentation.

This study, therefore, aims to investigate how the English translation of *Raja Gidh* negotiates the cultural content of the original Urdu text. Specifically, it examines which translation strategies—domestication or foreignization—are predominantly used in rendering cultural, religious, and idiomatic expressions, and what implications these strategies have for the representation of Pakistani identity and Islamic worldview. Through a qualitative comparative analysis of selected culturally loaded excerpts from both the source and target texts, the study seeks to uncover the ideological underpinnings and translational choices made by the translator.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to contribute to the ongoing discourse in cultural translation, especially in the postcolonial and South Asian context. By focusing on a canonical text like *Raja Gidh*, the study not only illuminates the complexities of translating culturally dense literature but also offers insights into how translation becomes a site of ideological mediation. Furthermore, the research underscores the translator's agency in shaping cross-cultural narratives and the ethical considerations involved in choosing between assimilation and authenticity.

In the sections that follow, the article reviews relevant literature on cultural translation, outlines the theoretical framework based on domestication and foreignization, describes the research methodology, analyzes selected examples from the novel, and concludes with the implications of the findings for translation studies and literary criticism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Translation studies have evolved significantly over the past few decades, moving beyond the traditional binary of fidelity versus freedom to encompass more nuanced considerations of culture, ideology, and identity. Literary translation, in particular, is recognized not just as a linguistic act but as a deeply cultural

one, wherein the translator serves as a mediator between two different worldviews. The translation of culturally loaded texts, such as Bano Qudsia's *Raja Gidh*, brings into focus the strategic choices a translator must make—especially between domestication and foreignization.

The concepts of **domestication** and **foreignization** were initially articulated by Friedrich Schleiermacher in 1813, who argued that the translator must either “leave the author in peace as much as possible and move the reader toward him” (foreignization) or “leave the reader in peace and move the author toward him” (domestication) (Schleiermacher, 1813/2004). This dichotomy was later revived and expanded by Lawrence Venuti, who strongly advocated for foreignization as an ethical translation practice. According to Venuti (1995), domestication involves a process of cultural assimilation that makes the source text conform to the values and norms of the target culture, often at the cost of erasing the cultural specificity of the original. Foreignization, by contrast, resists this cultural adaptation and retains the "otherness" of the source text, encouraging the target reader to engage with the cultural and linguistic strangeness of the source.

Venuti (1998) further argued that domestication tends to reinforce hegemonic cultural norms, particularly in Anglo-American translation practices, where fluency and transparency are prioritized. As a result, foreign cultures are often misrepresented or flattened, creating a false sense of universality. In this view, foreignization serves not only as a linguistic strategy but as a form of cultural resistance against the homogenization of global literature.

In the South Asian context, scholars such as Asaduddin (2009) and Mehfooz (2016) have examined how cultural translation is complicated by postcolonial legacies and linguistic hierarchies. Urdu, as both a literary and culturally rich language, poses unique challenges for translators, especially when the original texts are deeply embedded in religious, social, and philosophical traditions. Asaduddin (2009) emphasizes that translators often face the dilemma of either preserving the original context—risking incomprehensibility to the target reader—or adapting the text, potentially misrepresenting the cultural essence.

The practice of **cultural translation** extends beyond linguistic fidelity and enters the domain of identity politics, power dynamics, and ideological representation. Homi Bhabha (1994) argues that cultural translation is inherently performative and hybrid, occurring in the "third space" where meaning is negotiated rather than merely transferred. For Bhabha, translation is not about equivalence but about constructing new meanings through the act of mediation. This perspective is particularly relevant for translating texts like *Raja Gidh*, which are deeply entangled in questions of morality, religion, and postcolonial identity.

Bassnett and Lefevere (1990) also emphasize the **manipulative nature of translation**, pointing out that every translation is shaped by the ideological, cultural, and political contexts in which it is produced. Their cultural turn in translation studies foregrounds the role of the translator as an active agent who interprets and recontextualizes meaning. This aligns with Tymoczko's (2003) view that translation is a form of cultural representation, where the translator's choices are influenced by both internal (source text) and external (target culture) factors.

Previous research on literary translation from Urdu into English has often focused on themes of untranslatability, loss of meaning, and strategies for retaining cultural nuance. However, there remains a gap in exploring how specific strategies—such as domestication and foreignization—are employed in translating canonical texts like *Raja Gidh*. This study addresses that gap by analyzing selected cultural,

religious, and idiomatic expressions from the original text and its English counterpart, thereby contributing to the growing body of work on cultural translation in the postcolonial South Asian context.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in the theoretical perspectives of domestication and foreignization, as primarily developed by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1813/2004) and Lawrence Venuti (1995, 1998). These concepts form the core of translation theory, especially when the task involves navigating complex cultural terrains, as is the case with the English translation of *Raja Gidh*. The study also incorporates insights from cultural translation theory, particularly Homi Bhabha's (1994) notion of the "third space," to understand the role of translation as a site of negotiation between languages, identities, and ideologies.

The foundational idea of domestication and foreignization stems from Schleiermacher's (1813/2004) seminal work, where he outlined two possible approaches to translation: the translator either moves the reader toward the author (foreignization) or brings the author to the reader (domestication). These approaches are not simply linguistic choices; they represent ideological and cultural positions. A domesticated translation minimizes the strangeness of the foreign text by adapting it to the target culture, often at the cost of diluting its original cultural essence. Conversely, a foreignized translation maintains the cultural difference and resists full assimilation, compelling the reader to engage with the source culture on its own terms.

Venuti (1995) revived and politicized Schleiermacher's dichotomy by framing it within the context of Anglo-American translation practices. He criticized the overwhelming dominance of domestication in English-language translations, arguing that it renders the translator invisible and promotes ethnocentrism. Venuti advocated for foreignization as a strategy of cultural resistance and ethical responsibility, emphasizing the need to preserve the linguistic and cultural uniqueness of the source text. In this context, translation is not just a technical process but a form of cultural representation that can either reinforce or challenge dominant ideologies.

In translating culturally rich texts like *Raja Gidh*, which is infused with Islamic concepts, South Asian social codes, and Urdu idiomatic expressions, the choice between domestication and foreignization becomes crucial. A domesticated version may make the text accessible to Western readers but risks misrepresenting or oversimplifying the depth of the original culture. On the other hand, a foreignized version retains the cultural integrity of the source text but may pose comprehension challenges to readers unfamiliar with the socio-religious context of Pakistan. Therefore, the translator's decisions reflect broader ideological positions concerning cultural visibility, representation, and reader orientation (Venuti, 1998).

In addition to Venuti's framework, this study also draws from the concept of cultural translation as articulated by Homi Bhabha (1994). Bhabha argues that translation is not merely a transfer of meaning from one culture to another but a performative and political act that occurs in a liminal "third space." This space allows for the negotiation of hybrid meanings and identities that do not exist in either the source or target culture alone. In this view, translation becomes a site of cultural contestation and re-articulation, especially in postcolonial contexts where asymmetries of power and identity are at play. This perspective is especially relevant to *Raja Gidh*, a novel deeply rooted in Islamic morality and postcolonial ideology, where cultural elements cannot be separated from the political and philosophical worldview of the author.

The theoretical framework employed in this study thus enables a critical analysis of the English translation of *Raja Gidh*, examining not only what is translated and how, but also why certain cultural choices are made. It facilitates an exploration of the ideological implications of translation strategies and the extent to which the English version of the novel represents or distorts the original cultural context. Ultimately, this framework provides the lens through which domestication and foreignization are evaluated, and how they shape the target reader's understanding of the source culture.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative comparative textual analysis approach to examine the translation strategies employed in the English version of Bano Qudsia's *Raja Gidh*. The aim is to identify and analyze instances where the translator has either domesticated or foreignized culturally significant expressions, with particular attention to religious terminology, socio-cultural references, idiomatic phrases, and lexical choices. Given the text's strong cultural and religious grounding, qualitative methods are best suited to capture the nuanced meanings and ideological implications embedded in translation decisions (Creswell, 2014).

Research Design

The study follows a descriptive-analytical design, focusing on a close reading of selected passages from both the original Urdu text and its English translation. The analysis is structured to highlight culturally loaded segments and compare their translation equivalents to determine whether the translator has employed domestication or foreignization. The criteria for evaluation are drawn from the theoretical framework established by Venuti (1995) and Bhabha (1994), which views translation as an ideological and cultural act rather than merely a linguistic operation.

Data Selection and Sampling

The primary texts for this study are:

- The original Urdu version of *Raja Gidh* by Bano Qudsia (1981)
- Its available English translation (Masood A Raja, 2010, *Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies* Vol. 2, No. 1)

To ensure a focused analysis, the study uses purposive sampling to select approximately 30–40 culturally rich examples from the novel. These include:

- **Religious terms** (e.g., Allah, Halal, Haram, Qayamat)
- **Social norms and traditions** (e.g., cultural greetings, gender roles, honor-based expressions)
- **Food items and dress codes** (e.g., biryani, shalwar kameez)
- **Idioms and metaphors** specific to Urdu or Islamic culture

Each selected term or phrase is analyzed based on:

1. Its **original meaning and cultural context** in Urdu
2. The **translated version** in English
3. The **strategy used**—domestication (adaptation to TL norms) or foreignization (retaining SL flavor)

4. The **impact of the translation** on cultural representation and reader understanding

Analytical Framework

The analysis employs the domestication–foreignization continuum outlined by Venuti (1995, 1998), in which translation choices are evaluated in terms of:

- **Cultural visibility:** Does the translation preserve the foreign culture’s identity, or does it adapt it to the TL norms?
- **Translator’s visibility:** Does the translator intervene overtly (visible), or remain neutral and backgrounded (invisible)?
- **Reader orientation:** Is the translation adjusted to suit the TL reader’s familiarity, or does it challenge them to engage with the SL culture?

In addition, Bhabha’s (1994) theory of cultural hybridity and third space informs the interpretation of instances where translations blend both strategies, creating new intercultural meaning rather than adhering strictly to one strategy.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is limited to one literary text and its English translation. As such, its findings are not intended to be generalized across all Urdu-English translations. Moreover, the study focuses only on textual data and does not include the translator’s commentary or reception studies, which could offer further insights. The subjective nature of textual interpretation is also acknowledged as a potential limitation, though it is mitigated through theoretical grounding and textual evidence.

DATA ANALYSIS

This section presents a comparative analysis of selected cultural elements from Bano Qudsia’s *Raja Gidh* and their English translations. The analysis focuses on identifying and interpreting the use of **domestication** and **foreignization** in translating culturally specific terms, idioms, and religious references. The examination is grounded in Venuti’s (1995) dichotomy of translation strategies and Bhabha’s (1994) notion of cultural hybridity. The examples analyzed below demonstrate how cultural meanings are either preserved or adapted, thereby influencing the target reader’s perception of the source culture.

Religious Terms

Example 1: The term “حرام” (Haram) In *Raja Gidh*, the word "حرام" frequently appears in discussions of morality and religious prohibitions. In the English translation, it is often rendered as "forbidden" or "sinful."

- **Analysis:** The term "forbidden" carries a general moral weight in English but lacks the profound religious and spiritual connotations attached to "حرام" in Islamic discourse. By translating "حرام" as "forbidden," the translator adopts a **domestication strategy**, making the text more accessible to non-Muslim readers but simultaneously diluting the theological gravity of the concept (Venuti, 1995). A foreignizing strategy, retaining "Haram" with a footnote or glossary entry, would have preserved its cultural specificity.

Social Practices and Values

Example 2: “عزت” (Izzat / Honor) The Urdu term "عزت" reflects a deeply embedded cultural value in South Asian societies, especially in relation to family reputation and gender roles. In one scene, a female character speaks of preserving her "عزت", which is translated simply as "dignity."

- **Analysis:** While “dignity” is a close equivalent, it lacks the collective and familial connotation of "عزت". This is an instance of **domestication**, where the translator replaces a culturally dense term with a TL equivalent that aligns with Western individualistic values (Venuti, 1998). The loss of cultural nuance demonstrates what Bhabha (1994) calls the "erasure of difference" in cultural translation, where the ideological depth of the source term is neutralized.

Food and Cultural Items

Example 3: “بریانی” (Biryani) In one passage, characters share a traditional dish: "ہم نے دوپہر کو بریانی کھائی" (We ate biryani for lunch). The English version translates it directly as “We ate rice for lunch.”

- **Analysis:** This translation is a clear example of **domestication**, as "rice" is a generic term that does not capture the culinary, cultural, and sensory specificity of "بریانی". Biryani is not merely rice; it is a layered, spiced, and ceremonial dish integral to South Asian identity. A **foreignizing approach**, preserving the word "biryani" (possibly italicized or explained in a footnote), would respect its cultural significance (Tymoczko, 2003).

Idioms and Metaphors

Example 4: “اونٹ کے منہ میں زیرہ” This idiom, literally "a cumin seed in a camel’s mouth," implies something insignificant or inadequate. The English version renders it as “a drop in the ocean.”

- **Analysis:** Here, the translator uses **dynamic equivalence** (Nida, 1964) rather than a literal translation. Although the meaning is preserved, the rich imagery of the original idiom—rooted in South Asian context—is lost. This reflects a **domesticating** strategy, which prioritizes TL fluency over SL authenticity. According to Venuti (1995), such practices contribute to the invisibility of the translator and the source culture.

Hybrid Strategy Example

Example 5: “Qayamat” (قیامت) In one part, the term “قیامت” is retained as “Qayamat” and italicized, followed by contextual explanation: “The Qayamat, the day of judgment, shall decide our fate.”

- **Analysis:** This approach reflects a **foreignization strategy**, as it retains the original term and introduces the reader to an Islamic eschatological concept. By doing so, the translator maintains the term’s religious and cultural identity while aiding comprehension. This aligns with Bhabha’s (1994) idea of the “third space,” where meaning is co-constructed through cultural exchange rather than substitution.

Summary of Analysis

The analysis reveals a **predominant use of domestication** in the English translation of *Raja Gidh*, often at the cost of cultural richness and specificity. While this strategy increases readability for the target audience, it can result in the **erasure of cultural difference** and religious nuance. However, some instances show **hybrid strategies**, where foreign terms are retained and explained, thereby fostering cross-cultural understanding without sacrificing readability. This supports Venuti's (1998) call for an ethical, visible translation practice and Bhabha's (1994) vision of translation as a space of cultural negotiation and hybridity.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study demonstrate a **clear dominance of domestication strategies** in the English translation of Bano Qudsia's *Raja Gidh*. While certain culturally embedded elements were preserved through foreignization (e.g., *Qayamat*, *biryani*), the translator predominantly opted to simplify or adapt culturally and religiously rich concepts to align with the norms and expectations of the target audience.

The analysis shows that:

- **Religious terms** such as *Haram*, *Izzat*, and *Qayamat* were often either generalized (e.g., "forbidden", "dignity") or transliterated with minimal contextual explanation. This suggests an inconsistent approach, where foreignization was attempted but not fully realized.
- **Idioms and metaphors** were mostly replaced with culturally equivalent English idioms (e.g., "drop in the ocean"), showing a strong preference for **dynamic equivalence** (Nida, 1964) and readability over cultural fidelity.
- **Food items and dress references** were occasionally neutralized (e.g., *biryani* rendered as "rice"), revealing a tendency to reduce foreignness and avoid overburdening the reader with unfamiliar terms.

This domestication-centric approach aligns with Venuti's (1995) critique of Anglo-American translation practices, where the translator often remains invisible by smoothing over cultural differences. While this promotes fluency and acceptability, it also leads to **cultural flattening**, reducing the ideological and sociolinguistic impact of the original text. Furthermore, the translator's choice to domesticate reflects an implicit power dynamic—privileging the linguistic and cultural norms of the target audience over those of the source culture (Venuti, 1998).

However, in certain passages, a **hybrid strategy** was employed where the translator retained source language terms and offered brief explanations (e.g., "The Qayamat, the day of judgment..."). These moments reflect a shift toward **foreignization** and cultural transparency, offering the target reader access to deeper cultural and religious meanings embedded in the original text (Bhabha, 1994). These instances, though limited, serve as crucial points of cultural negotiation and intercultural communication.

CONCLUSION

In examining the English translation of Bano Qudsia's *Raja Gidh*, this study reveals a dominant trend of domestication, a strategy that aims to adapt culturally rich and ideologically charged Urdu expressions into more accessible forms for the target language (TL) readership. While domestication enhances fluency and immediate comprehension, it often comes at the cost of erasing or neutralizing culturally embedded

meanings, especially in the context of religious terms like *Haram* and *Izzat*, as well as idiomatic expressions and references to traditional food, dress, and social values. These translation choices, though seemingly neutral, are not without ideological consequence—they reflect a larger systemic tendency in translation to prioritize the norms of dominant cultures over those of marginalized or non-Western linguistic traditions (Venuti, 1995). Such practices may inadvertently perpetuate a colonial hierarchy in cultural representation, where source language (SL) cultures are simplified or repackaged to suit the expectations of the TL audience. On the other hand, the occasional use of foreignization, such as the retention of terms like *Qayamat* or *burqa*, suggests a limited effort to preserve the distinctiveness of the source culture and foster intercultural dialogue. These moments of foreignization, though rare, demonstrate the potential for translation to function as a “third space” (Bhabha, 1994)—a site of negotiation and hybridity where cultures intersect and co-create meaning. However, the overall imbalance in strategy reflects the translator’s invisible role, aligning with Venuti’s (1995) critique of the translator’s effacement in favor of TL norms. The conclusion drawn from this analysis is that a more deliberate and ethically informed approach to translation is needed—one that acknowledges the cultural weight of the source text and resists the impulse to domesticate excessively. For culturally and religiously nuanced texts like *Raja Gidh*, a balanced application of both domestication and foreignization would better serve the purpose of cultural preservation, reader understanding, and ideological transparency. This study not only contributes to the broader field of Translation Studies but also raises essential questions about how cultural identity, postcolonial discourse, and religious thought are translated—or mistranslated—through language. It advocates for a translation practice that is not only linguistically faithful but also culturally responsible, thereby allowing target readers to engage more meaningfully with the richness and complexity of the source culture.

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