

## Sacredness, Translatability, and Genre in the *Kristapurana*

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### Abstract

The *Kristapurana* (1616) of Thomas Stephens was composed in the *ovi* metre, in the tradition of early Marathi *Puranas*. As the canonical Sanskrit *Puranas* of the Indian subcontinent began to be translated by poets into the vernacular languages, they were infused with new stories and regional idioms leading to a “novelization” of the epic genre of *Puranas*. The transformation of *Puranas* as they entered the vernacular languages provides critical insight into the significance of genre in the process of cultural translation. The *Purana* appears to possess an inherent “openness” as a genre which made it ideal for regional poets to narrate their own legends alongside canonical ones. Stephens composed his poetic version of the Christian Bible in the form of a *Purana* and placed his narrative within the framework of Purannic expectations. In the *Kristapurana*, Christ becomes ‘*Vaicunthya-swami*’ and his throne is set in *Vaicunthya*, the traditional abode of the Hindu God, Vishnu. The *Kristapurana* can be read as an example of the translatability of the *Puranas* and their potential for “novelization”. Stephens’ chose to call his composition a “*Purana*”, bringing with it the conventions of sacredness attached to the genre. This study attempts to decipher why a missionary would translate biblical stories using a genre sacred to Hindus, in spite of the Church’s resistance against local literary forms. A close reading of select passages from the text is undertaken to demonstrate how both the biblical narrative and the genre are transformed in this process of translation. The present study critically analyses the novelization of the Purannic genre in the context of the *Kristapurana*.

**Keywords:** Cultural translation, genre and translation, *Purana*, Marathi literature, translatability.

## 1. Cultural Translation and Genre

The *Kristapurana* (1616) of Thomas Stephens (1549 – 1616) is placed at the intersection of two sacred traditions, the Biblical and the Puranic. The *Kristapurana*<sup>1</sup> is one of the earliest retellings of the Bible in an Indian language. It is a text in which two culturally disparate traditions converge, providing insight into the cultural complexities of such “sacred encounters”. The present study attempts to understand the genre of the *Kristapurana* and the transformations that take place when a Christian narrative is told in the form of a “Purana”. The Purana, in spite of its lofty style and epic proportions, is open to novelization. The critical relationship between the ideas of “genre” and “translation” is one of the aspects explored in the following sections. A reading of the *Kristapurana* brings to our mind the anxiety evoked (both for the missionary and the native convert) when an indigenous form is used to convey the doctrines of a “foreign” faith. The text is read, not as a “harmonious” blending of two religious and literary traditions, but rather as a site which evokes the anxieties involved in the process of cultural translation of a religious text.

In translation, the genre chosen is a major transmissive decision that affects the literary shape and reception of the translated text.<sup>2</sup> Different genres evoke different expectations and responses from an audience as they “[...] create effects of reality and truth which are central to the different ways the world is understood” (Frow 19). John Frow argues that genre works at the level of semiosis or meaning-making “which is deeper and more forceful than the explicit ‘content’ of a text” (Frow 19). A genre that is held in reverence in a source culture may not be held in similar reverence in a target culture. The meaning ascribed to the genre itself shapes the meaning of the translated ‘content’. The choice of the Puranic form to convey a Biblical message is significant in this context.

The translator has to make crucial decisions in such a case and either bring the source genre to the local culture or translate into a genre that evokes similar “expectations” in the target culture. Hepzibah Israel in her work *Religious Transactions in Colonial South India* (2011), discusses the Protestant missionaries’ choice of genre while translating the Bible in South India. Israel argues that the local Tamils ascribed sacred value to poetic works rather than prose texts. There was no literary tradition of writing serious, religious texts in prose (Israel 171). The Protestants, however, translated Christian texts into prose. The Catholics, who arrived in Tamil Nadu two centuries before the Protestants, translated Christian literature into poetic forms.<sup>3</sup> The Protestants were suspicious of this Catholic use of indigenous forms for evangelization. For them, any form that was related to Hinduism was unsuitable to the Christian message.<sup>4</sup>

Stephens’ mastery over the *ovi* metre used by the Purana writers in Marathi and the creative shaping of Christianity into a Purana is one of the important decisions he makes as a cultural translator. Stephens defends his choice of genre in the Purana itself:

Marathi	English ( <i>Translation Mine</i> )
Ha motta <i>abhiprauo</i> zi mhanne Tumĩ <i>tari</i> varilĩ maguilĩ purannẽ Tari pratipustaquẽ amã caranne Caissy <i>nacarity</i> tumĩ  ( <i>Kristapurana</i> 1.1.143)	He said, Sir, this is an important suggestion Have you not refused us the old Puranas Then why do you not compose Similar books for us

A group of neo-Christians came to Stephens and requested that they should be given books in their own language to read. The reason they gave for this request was that they had been banned by the church from reading Hindu literature after they converted to Catholicism. This passage also gives us a glimpse of the neo-converts’ life in seventeenth century Goa. The

restrictions placed by the Inquisitor's office and the Portuguese administration led to sites of tension, which forced missionaries to come up with creative ways of negotiating the process of translation of individuals from being a Hindu to a Christian.

## 2. Novelization and the Purana

The Puranas deal with origins, destruction, and regeneration and are considered sacred, specifically in Hindu culture (Hazra 241). As a result of the sacredness and veneration accorded to the Puranas, they have been described as the "fifth Veda", putting them next only to the Vedas in authority. Apart from the religious veneration accorded to Puranas, they also influenced "early ideas of cosmography and geography" in the Indian Subcontinent and have been treated as early geographical documents (Rocher 130,131). Puranic texts have also been read as historical documents of dynasties and migration on the subcontinent. Notwithstanding the debates surrounding the authenticity of the historical information contained in Puranic works, these texts are rich storehouses delineating the linguistic and cultural evolution of the Subcontinent (Rocher 118 – 130).

A Purana should contain five primary distinguishing marks: *Sarga* (creation), *pratisarga* (dissolution or recreation), *manvantara* (early periods of mankind), *vamsa* (genealogies), *vamsyanucharita* (accounts of persons mentioned in the genealogies) (Pargiter 449, Hazra 241, 242, Rao 87). Stephens' *Kristapurana* contains all five distinguishing marks of a Purana. It contains the story of the creation of the world, of the flood and re-creation, the genealogy of humankind and of Jesus Christ, stories of patriarchs and saints. According to Malshe, the *Kristapurana* is based on the Bible and as such, the Bible can also be said to hold all these distinguishing marks of a Purana (Malshe 404).

Scholars of Puranic literature argue that all the five distinguishing marks, *pancalaksana*, may not necessarily be found in every Purana. Rao argues, in his essay “Purana as Brahminic Ideology” (1993), that rather than constituting the actual content of Puranic texts, the *pancalaksana* can be viewed as an “ideology”<sup>5</sup> or a “worldview”:

*Laksana* is not a definition; nor do the five *laksanas* inform us of the contents of a Purana. *Laksana*, as the dictionary tells us, is a distinguishing mark. Furthermore, *laksanas* are not necessarily objective, empirically observed facts; they could be perceived “facts”. [...] The five *laksanas* order the events of the Purana. They provide the listeners with a view of time and space in which the events narrated in the Puranas occur. In other words, the *pancalaksanas* create a world and a worldview. (Rao 89)

The *pancalaksana*,<sup>6</sup> thus, provide a framework of time and space within which the stories contained in the *Purana* are enacted. In the case of regional folk narratives that began to appear in the Puranic tradition, this framework provided access to the larger worldview of Sanskrit *Puranas* and gave these folk traditions a space to locate themselves within the dominant (in this case Sanskrit) literary tradition.<sup>7</sup> According to Rao, Puranic texts cannot be considered as individual bound texts. He states that “One could make sense of any of these texts only by listening to these texts as a part of this tradition” (Rao 92). Each of these texts is a part of the “totality of a text tradition with intertextual relationships and commentarial contexts” (Rao 92). The *pancalaksanas* run like threads through these numerous texts, holding them together as a tradition marked by intertextuality.

The earliest writings in the vernacular languages of India were translations of Sanskrit works (Ramakrishnan 30). These ‘vernacular’ Puranas told newer stories other than the traditional Sanskrit ones and took on a life of their own. They were new creations infused with the colour of the region in which they were being translated. These ‘transformed’ texts served as harbingers of a new vernacular tradition, as means of resisting existing hegemonic literary practices. By absorbing the traditions of the regions they were translated into, these “Puranas” developed their own distinct style.

In his essay, “Retelling as Interpretation: An Essay on Sarala Mahabharata” (2013), B.N. Patnaik presents a critical reading of the Odia text of Sarala Das’s<sup>8</sup> *Mahabharata*. Sarala Das insisted on calling his Odia *Mahabharata* a “Purana, a sacred text” (Patnaik 2). Sarala Das, in fact, went so far as to call it his “Vishnu Purana” (Patnaik 5). This raises the question as to why these regional poets insisted on calling their compositions by the name of “Purana”. It is possible that the title of “Purana” ascribed certain sacredness to the narrative by placing it within the tradition of the canonical Sanskrit Puranas.

Sarala Das had no narrative tradition to draw from when he wrote his *Mahabharata*, as “he was the one who created the tradition” (Patnaik 6). Sarala chose to name his Odia *Mahabharata* a Purana. Stephens was in similar position when he began missionary work in sixteenth century Goa. He had no precedent of a Bible or any biblical narrative which had been translated into an Indian language. Stephens, like Sarala Das, chose to narrate his story in verse and name it as a “Purana”. The Purana gives rise to certain expectations of sacredness and places the works in this tradition in the temporal-spatial framework of the ancient texts.

Stephens’ *Kristapurana* was located in the tradition of Marathi Puranas. Stephens himself mentions in his “Introduction” to the *Kristapurana* that he was following the style and language of the poets of the region (Stephens and Saldanha XCIII). In his doctoral thesis, Malshe lists a stack of Marathi texts and their Portuguese translations which were found in Portugal. Among these are handwritten manuscripts of *Harishchandra Purana* (author unknown), *Dronapurana*, Dnyandev’s *Yogavasishta* among other texts.<sup>9</sup> This establishes the theory that Stephens had access to the works of classical Marathi poets. While there is evidence that Stephens had read Sanskrit (Zwartjes 46), his text is located in the tradition of the Marathi Puranas listed by Malshe. This is clear from the language and poetic devices used

by Stephens in his work. The influence of Marathi saint poets on Stephens is evident in numerous passages in his work, specifically in passages where a deep devotion and longing for the “divine” is seen, reminiscent of the Bhakti poetry of the region. Malshe has compiled a detailed comparison of passages from the *Kristapurana* with these canonical Marathi texts. A study of Malshe’s comparisons reveals similarities in style and language between Stephens and other Marathi poets. Malshe compares the *Kristapurana* separately with each of these texts, perhaps with a view to prove that Stephens was leaning heavily on the earlier poets for inspiration. In this process, we also learn that all these poets, including Stephens, had several usages which appear strikingly similar. The Marathi Purana tradition was thus developing its own distinct identity, of which Stephens was a part.

The genre of Purana, thus, appears to provide spaces for new stories and languages to seep in, while still being recognized among the repertoire of Puranas. V. N. Rao argues that the Purana have a quality of open-endedness and flexibility which enables them to accommodate stories from varied regions and beliefs. He makes this argument by positioning the Purana against the Vedas, which are closed texts to which nothing can be added or removed. Every sound of the Vedas has to be preserved intact. In opposition to this, the Purannic texts have a “flexibility of content” (Rao 93) with a fixed ideology, which, in Rao’s opinion, is manifested as the *pancalaksana*.

The Puranas are “functionally open texts: they have accepted into their fold events, stories legends, and occurrences of many regions and communities, transforming them to conform to a fixed ideology” (Rao 94). This open ended nature provides space for new stories, language, and to enter this epic form leading to a “novelization”, a renewal of the classical genre. Mikhail Bakhtin in “Epic and Novel” proposes the idea of the novelization of the “epic”.

They become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extra literary language, they become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humor, elements of self parody, and finally – this is the most important thing – the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality

(Bakhtin and Holquist 7)

Bakhtin proposes that it is the influence of the genre of novel that creates this novelization. In the present work, “novelization” is used primarily to underline the Puranic genre’s capacity for accommodating varied narratives and its capacity to evolve with time. The Puranic genre exhibits a potential for “novelization” which made it possible for numerous regional legends to be accommodated within the genre. In the case of the Puranas, it would seem that this potential for novelization is inherent in the genre, making it open to accepting external influences. In the context of Puranas, it was the “folk” that began to novelize the genre in the regions that Puranas were they were being translated (Ramanujan 101, Rao 89). These novelized regional Puranas continued to call themselves Puranas, and in the process each region developed its own distinctive register of Puranic texts.

Novelization can only take place when a genre provides “space” for newness to enter. Bakhtin argues in “Epic and Novel” that the epic genre are closed and moribund with no scope for any growth. The subjects and style of epics are predetermined and of ancient gravity. As opposed to this, the genre of novel is fresh, open and ever-changing. Bakhtin argues that it is the effect of the novel on literary systems that leads to the entry of new fables, language and idioms into the epic (Bakhtin and Holquist 7). However, it can be seen from the example of the Puranas that in order for novelization to take place in an epic, the epic genre should provide a space for new stories to enter. The novel cannot “access” an epic genre without these “spaces” into which they can seep in and imbue with newness. In the example of the Vedas stated above, novelization is not a possibility. The Puranas however, provide these “spaces” where novelization can occur.

The inherent tendency of the Purana to be novelized can also be read in the light of Benjamin's idea of "translatability". According to Benjamin, "Translatability is an essential quality of certain works, which is not to say that it is essential that they be translated; it means rather that a specific significance inherent in the original manifests itself in its translatability" (Benjamin 254). The text holds the seeds of its translation in itself. Benjamin argues that certain texts call to be translated. It is not necessary that these texts must be translated in practice, but they possess an innate feature which invites translation. It is possible that this nature of translatability within the Puranas was one of the reasons, in addition to the religious significance enjoyed by them, which made them some of the first texts to be translated from Sanskrit to the vernaculars. As they began to be translated and came into contact with regional "folk" narratives, they became open to "novelization" giving rise to a new and vigorous Purannic tradition in the vernacular languages of the subcontinent.

Missionaries like Stephens fully understood the high value of poetic traditions in conveying religious truths as opposed to the prose in which European texts were composed. The *Kristapurana* of Stephens is a site which opens up questions on and provokes inquiry into the genre of Purana. As a literary text, the *Kristapurana* enables an understanding of the translatability of the Purannic genre and its potential for "novelization". As a translator, Stephens wanted his narrative to be considered sacred and given the reverence that was given to Hindu religious literature. By choosing to translate the story of the Bible into a "sacred" tradition such as the Purana, Stephens translated two traditions: (a) the biblical tradition which got transformed when it was recited as a Purana and (b) the Purannic genre which got "translated" and "novelized" in its encounter with Christian scriptures. Stephens took the classical genre of Purana and explored its translatability and potential for novelization to the fullest.

### 3. '*Vaicunthta*': Translating Heaven

Stephens, through his appropriation of the Puranic genre, succeeded in ascribing historicity and sacredness to the story of the Bible. *Vaicunthta* is translated into a Christian heaven through the form of the Purana, the genre itself lending sacredness to the content of the *Kristapurana*. Diogo Ribeiro, editor of Stephens' *Doutrina Christa*<sup>10</sup>, comments on Stephens' use of the word '*Vaicunthta*' in Christian writings. Ribeiro writes in the introduction:

[...] this word (vainkuttha = vaikuntha) is used among the Heathens and in *Canarim* language means Heaven, inhabited by their Gods (pagodes); although already today in the same language among the Christians it is used and means our Heaven of glory and blessedness (Xavier and Zupanov 227).

*Vaicunthta* is firmly established by Stephens as the abode of the Trinity. All allusions to Paradise in the Bible are translated by him as *Vaicunthta*. The throne of the creator God is set there and that is where all humans return after that they have attained *moksha*, to become one with their Creator. The grand plan of God for mankind is formulated and orchestrated from this central site, *Vaicunthta*. The deity ascribed to the ruler of *Vaicunthta*, Vishnu, is transferred to the Christian godhead through translation. Christ, then, becomes *Vaicunthtanayak* (Leader of *Vaicunthta*), *Vaicunthtasabhecha kaanti* (light of the *Vaicunthta* assembly), *Vaicunthta raya* (king of *Vaicunthta*). The gospel enters the culture while the culture enters the gospel and both stand transformed, creating a new, third space within contested sacred spaces of Catholicism and Hinduism. Ribeiro's comment is testimony of the power of translation in grappling with the sacred - that the *Vaicunthta* that was once inhabited by 'heathen Gods' now means "our Heaven of glory and blessedness"

The *Kristapurana* begins in its first chapter with the creation of heaven by the Creator and ends with the victorious re-entry of Christ into heaven. In all these episodes, Stephens uses

*Vaicunttha* and *suarga*<sup>11</sup> interchangeably to describe the abode of God. *Vaicunttha* is the abode of the Hindu God Vishnu (Wilson xx). *Vaicunttha* is also known as *Vishnupada* or the “feet of *Vishnu*”. *Vaicunttha* is distinct from the other ‘spheres’ or *lokas* of the heavens. H. Wilson (1786 – 1860), the colonial Indologist, explains in his summary of the *Padma Purana* that *Vaicunttha*, the abode of Vishnu is placed above all the other spheres or *lokas* of *suarga*. “The *Swarga Khańda* describes in the first chapters the relative positions of the *Lokas* or spheres above the earth, placing above all *Vaikuńtha*, the sphere of *Vishńu*”(Wilson 1840, xx). It has also been described as “the highest of regions, the blessed abode of *Visnu*” (Raychaudhury 78).

The protagonist of the *Kristapurana* is Jesus Christ. Stephens, while translating Christ for a Marathi readership, may have had to decide what kind of Jesus he wanted to portray for his readers, the neo-Christians of Goa. These neo-Christians were Brahmins who had read the Hindu *Puranas* and understood the hierarchy of Hindu deities. Christ had to find a space above all the other Gods that they had worshipped until then. Stephens aim was to convince the local readers that Christ is the only true Saviour. He was fully confident that once the locals read the whole story of Christ, they would be persuaded that the Christian “shastra” (sacred text) is different from all the other “shastra” they had read until then. He writes in his introduction to the Purana:

Yetuquẽ amanchea xastra anny anniyeca xastra bhituri *antara* ahe *aissẽ* mhannaunu *samasta* deqhaty. Mhannaunu ami hea amanchea Purannantu teanchẽ xastra *lattica* anny amanchẽ *sate* *aissẽ* mhannaunu *daqhaunssi* *nahĩ casttauatõ*; *cã* *tẽ* *apaissẽ* *samastanssi* *drustty* *paddataye*; *Christauanchẽ* *xastra* *apannapẽ* *sobhataye*, *mirauataye*, *va* *tenchi* *baraue* *mhannaunu* *apannapẽ* *daunu* *dentaye*; *vachileya* *aquileya* *pure*.

(Stephens and Saldanha XCIV)

All can see that there is a difference between our sacred text and other sacred texts. Therefore no effort has been made in our Purana to prove that their texts are false and our text is true; because it is evident to everyone on its own. The sacred text of

Christians shines beautifully on its own and shows that it is the excellent one. It is enough that it is read or heard.

(*Translation Mine*)

Stephens comes across in this passage as completely self-assured and certain that the “truth” of the Christian message could be conveyed even if the genre of Purana in which he chose to compose in was distinctly Hindu in its form and essence. His conviction is clear in his introduction. It is necessary, therefore, to understand where Stephens places Christ in relation to the Hindu Gods of the Puranas to convince people of his deity.

At the beginning of the *Paillem Puranna*, Stephens gives a description of *Vaicunthta*:

Marathi	English ( <i>Translation Mine</i> )
Hẽ yetuquẽ napure zahalẽ Anny suamiyẽ cae quelẽ Suarga varutẽ rachilẽ Vaicunthta sthana	And as if all this were not enough Again the Lord made Above the heavens, The place called Vaicunthta
Cae varnũ tea vaicunthhassi Yeuaddy mati qhainchy amanssi Upama dentã suarga prathuuissi Thoddy hoe	O, how should I describe this Vaicunthta Do I have the wisdom for describing it? If I compare it to all the heavens and the earth It will not suffice
(1.2.60, 61)	

*Vaicunthta* is created by the Christian God in these verses. It is significant that Stephens uses both “*suarga*” and “*Vaicunthta*” in the same sentence indicating that he makes a distinction between the two. “*Suarga*”, may be translated as heaven. Stephens, however, seems to have been aware that in the Hindu *puranas* the lesser deities inhabited the spheres of *suarga* while Vishnu, the supreme deity, dwelt in *Vaicunthta*. H. H. Wilson (1786 – 1860), the colonial Indologist, explains in his summary of the Padma Purana that *vaicunthta*, the abode of Vishnu is placed above all the other spheres or ‘*lokas*’ of ‘*swarga*’. It seems from the text

that Stephens wanted to ascribe to Christ the highest power among the Gods and placed him in *Vaicunttha* so that there was no doubt in the minds of the readers that the “Christian” God reigned supreme above all other Gods that the neo-converts had ever heard about, or worshipped, before.

#### 4. A Sacred Vocabulary

The Konkani scholar Suresh Amonkar in his Konkani translation of the *Kristapurana* proposes the “*Vaicunttha* model” (*Vaicunttha praroop*) to explain Stephens’ strategy to disseminate the Christian message (Amonkar 81). “The religious administration saw that it would be easy to entice the *Vaishnavite* Goan Hindus into the fold of Jesus Christ by translating ‘God’ as ‘*Vaicunttha-nath*’, ‘Jesus Christ’ as ‘*Vaicunttha-putra*’, ‘*Vaicunttha-mauli*’ and ‘heaven’ as ‘*Vaicunttha*’ (Amonkar 81).<sup>12</sup> Amonkar argues that the “*Vaicunttha* model” was a strategy to convert locals to Christianity by composing texts that were similar to their sacred texts.

The translation that is seen in the *Kristapurana* is not a mere linguistic transfer of Christian words into the language of the Hindus but a cultural transaction, a moment in translation when the culture becomes an inseparable part of the message that is conveyed during evangelization. The culture that the missionaries intended to replace with a Christian one was harnessed to convey Christian meanings. Vicente Rafael in his volume *Contracting Colonialism* (1988) writes:

Translation is then a matter of first discerning the differences between and within social codes and then of seeing the possibility of getting across those differences. To do so is to succeed in communicating, that is, in recognizing and being recognized within the intelligible limits of a linguistic and social order. Hence if translation is to take place at all, it must do so within a context of expectation: that in return for one’s submission, one gets back the other’s acknowledgement of the value of one’s words and behaviour. (Rafael 210)

Rafael writes about translation in the context of conversion of the Tagalog society in Philippines into Catholicism and the nuances of translation in this religious encounter between disparate cultures. In order to get an “acknowledgement of the value of one’s words” from the target audience, the translator must “submit to the conventions of a given social order” (Rafael 210). In other words, the translator must first be translated by submitting to the conventions of the target culture. Only then effective communication can take place through translation. Translation emerges as more than mere linguistic transfer, as “records of cultural contestations and ideological struggles” (Tymoczko 443) that takes place when the sacred is translated in cross-cultural encounters.

Although Stephens, in his introduction to the *Kristapurana*, is confident of the truth of the Christian message, his “ideological struggles” as a translator are reflected in the text. In Avasvaru 1 of the first *Purana*, he describes the Trinity of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit:

Marathi	English ( <i>Translation Mine</i> )
Pita Putru dogai zanna Anny Spiritu Sanctu apanna Zari zahale tega zanna Tari tega Deua nhauaty	Both the Father and the Son And the Holy Spirit himself Though they are three persons Yet they are not three Gods
Tega zannanchē yecachi tatua Yequi pracruti yeca suamitua Yecachi Deuapanna yeca zannatua Mhannoni tegai zanna yecuchi Deuo	The three are made of one matter One nature and one lordship One godhead, one knowledge Therefore the three are One God
(1.1. 17, 18)	

In this passage, the *padre-guru* explains the concept of “Trinity” to his listeners. We sense an anxiety that the Hindu converts may believe that Christians believe in three Gods. So, Stephens quickly clarifies that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, “*Zari zahale tega zanna / Tari tega Deua nhauaty*” (Though they are three persons/ Yet they are not three Gods). They are made of one substance and share one godhead. The apprehension of a Catholic priest translating the Biblical narrative into a form sacred to the Hindus of the region can be seen here.

Stephens’ anxiety can be understood against the background of the restrictions on translation into regional languages. Lynne Long quotes from the *Liturgicam Authenticam*, a document of the Catholic Church created after the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), giving instructions on the use of the vernacular in liturgy:

[...] it is to be kept in mind from the beginning that the translation of liturgical texts of the Roman Liturgy is not so much a work of creative innovation as it is of rendering the original texts faithfully and accurately into the vernacular language (Long 6).

The distrust of the inherent heretical nature of translation existed in similar intensity during Stephens’ times. Translations of Christian texts into vernacular languages had to be cleared by the Inquisitor’s office and “creative innovation” was generally discouraged.

In the verse on Trinity quoted above, it is significant that the term for Holy Spirit, “*Spiritu Sanctu*” remains untranslated into Marathi. Untranslatability helped translators of sacred texts to maintain the ‘purity’ (Rafael 29) of sacred terms. Core terms like *Spiritu Sanctu* (Holy Spirit), *prophetu* (prophets), *trindad* (trinity) have been retained in Portuguese or Latin in the *Kristapurana*. Translation was unavoidable because the extent of evangelization and conversion was determined by translations of Christian texts. At the same time, untranslatability was used as a guard against the dangers of translation.

The encounter between gospel and culture brought the problems of cross-cultural translation to the fore. On the one hand there was the understanding that the ‘Word of God’ was pure and powerful, hence the danger of heresy in translation. On the other hand, there was the overwhelming need for large scale translation since the beginning of colonial missions, as “translation defined to an important degree the limits and possibilities of conversion” (Rafael 21). Through translation a text could be ‘subverted’ and meaning unintended by the original begin to surface. There are records of historical periods when the very act of translating a sacred text, whether ‘faithfully’ or otherwise, could lead to death on the charge of heresy.

In placing the Christian God in *Vaicunthta*, Stephens trod the fine line between heresy and ‘faithful’ translation. He submitted to existing social conventions in order to effectively communicate with his readership. His use of the idea of *Vaicunthta* is an example of this cultural submission. Simultaneously, he had to make a decision to leave terms like “*Spiritu sanctu*” and “*trindad*” untranslated in order to guard against the danger of the narrative slipping back into the repertoire of Hindu beliefs. The study of *Vaicunthta* in the *Kristapurana* sensitizes us to the balance between “heresy” and “accuracy” that a translator has to maintain while translating a sacred text. In the transmissive process of cultural translation, both the genre of Purana and the biblical narrative were transformed, creating a new expression of the genre. In the *Kristapurana*, the “Christian God” began to live in *Vaicunthta* and the new converts’ religious imagination was re-shaped, with figures of “new” lotus-eyed Gods introduced into their religious landscape. The *Kristapurana* reflects a transition in the identities of the neo-converts of Goa. Stephens captured these moments of transition in his translation of the biblical narrative into a distinctly South Asian genre.

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<sup>1</sup> The *Kristapurana* was originally published under the title *Discurso Sobre a Vinda de Jesu Christo Nosso Salvador ao Mundo* in 1616. Being translated this means, “Treatise on the Coming of Jesus Christ the Redeemer into the World”. Among all of Stephens’ works this is considered his *magnum opus*. He has a grammar of the Konkani language and a catechism to his credit, other than the *Kristapurana*. The *Kristapurana* is poetic work with 10,962 stanzas.

<sup>2</sup> The genre in which a translated work is presented to readers plays a role in shaping the meaning of the content within the text. Chandrani Chatterjee, in her work *Translation Reconsidered: Culture, genre and the “Colonial Encounter” in Nineteenth Century Bengal* (2010), views genre as a site for translation (Chatterjee 47). Chatterjee analyses the manner in which literary genre such as the epic, sonnet were appropriated by Bengali literature through translation practices.

<sup>3</sup> Beschi’s *Tempavani* (c.1796), is a classic example of this. In the *Tempavani*, Beschi translated small portions of the Bible into Tamil and modelled it after the *Kamparamayana* (Israel 175).

<sup>4</sup> Protestant missionaries who translated the Bible into Indian languages did work with indigenous concepts and lexical fields in the process of translation (Israel 2011, 104,121). As translators in foreign mission fields, Protestant missionaries had to negotiate existing religious vocabulary in the region. However, the Protestants were wary of using indigenous literary genre to translate sacred texts. (Israel 2011, 171).

<sup>5</sup> “[...] *pancalaksana* is the ideological frame that transforms whatever content is incorporated into that frame. Since the ideas of *pancalaksana* are tacitly assumed in the Brahmanic worldview, they do not appear in every Purana and do not constitute a sizeable length of the text even when they appear” (Rao 87, 88).

<sup>6</sup> V.N. Rao argues that the ancient puranas were known to have not five, but ten distinguishing maraks, or *dasalaksana* (Rao 89).

<sup>7</sup> Rao discusses the “Puranization” of the folk story of *Kanyaka* and elaborates on how it attained the position of a Purana in the *Vasava Kanyaka Purana* (Rao 89, 91).

<sup>8</sup> Sarala Das was an Odia poet who lived in the fifteenth century AD. He is widely regarded as the originator of Odia literature (Mohanty 26).

<sup>9</sup> Marathi texts found in Portugal:

*Krishnacharitrakatha* (Krishnadasnama); *Prahladcharitra* (Vishnudasnama); *Harishchandra Purana Katha* (Vishnudasnama); *Vasishtayogu* (Jnandeo); *Garudachi Katha* (Sivdas?); *Balkreeda* (Simpnama); *Harnichi Katha* (Author unknown); *Rajneetichya Ovyas*; *Bhagvad Gitechi Teeka* (Nivruttidev); *Ramacha Ashwamegh*; *Sukhdev Charitrakatha*; *Gurushishya Samvad*; *Madalsa*; *Rukmini Swayamvar*; *Dharmacha Aswamegh* (Vishnudasnama); *Varna Parva* (Vishnudasnama); *Seetaharan*; *Krushnarjunacha Samvadu*; *Mrugarajachi Katha*

Marathi texts translated into Portuguese:

*Yograj Tilak*; *Viveksindhu* (Mukundraj); *Jnaneswari*; Poetry of Vishnudasnama; *Anadi Purana*

Malshe has created this list based on a 1953 essay by Prof. Panduranga Pissurlencar describing the finding of early Marathi texts in Portugal. It is argued that some of these handwritten Marathi texts are in Stephens’ handwriting (Malshe 425, 426).

<sup>10</sup> This was the same Diogo Ribeiro who published an edited version of Stephens’ Catechism, *Doutrina Christa*, in 1622.

<sup>11</sup> The spelling of “*suarga*” (heaven) is as per Stephens’ Romanization in the *Kristapurana*, except in quotations where individual authors have used other spellings.

<sup>12</sup> Translated from Amonkar’s Konkani manuscript. *Translation mine*. Used with the kind permission of the author.

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