



Padma Rangarajan

Imperial Babel

Translation, Exoticism, and the Long Nineteenth Century

At the heart of every colonial encounter lies an act of translation. Once dismissed as a derivative process, the new cultural turn in translation studies has opened the field to dynamic considerations of the contexts that shape translations and that, in turn, reveal translation's truer function as a locus of power. In *Imperial Babel*, Padma Rangarajan explores translation's complex role in shaping literary and political relationships between India and Britain.

Unlike other readings that cast colonial translation as primarily a tool for oppression, Rangarajan's argues that translation changed both colonizer and colonized and undermined colonial hegemony as much as it abetted it. *Imperial Babel* explores the diverse political and cultural consequences of a variety of texts, from eighteenth-century oriental tales to mystic poetry of the *fin de siècle* and from translation proper to its ethnological, mythographic, and religious variants.

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Searching for translation's trace enables a broader, more complex understanding of intellectual exchange in imperial culture as well as a more nuanced awareness of the dialectical relationship between colonial policy and nineteenth-century literature. Rangarajan argues that while bearing witness to the violence that underwrites translation in colonial spaces, we should also remain open to the irresolution of translation, its unfixed nature, and its ability to transform both languages in which it works.

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Jacket photograph: *Translators at Work*. Image courtesy of the Center for Study of the Life and Work of William Carey, D.D. (1761-1834), William Carey University, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, USA

MLI Modern Language Initiative



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