

Fernando Pessoa in India: Three Anthologies in Hindi

Rita Ray*

A minuscule part of India—namely, Goa, Daman, Diu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli on the western coast—was a colony of Portugal for around 450 years, until 1961. Almost the rest of this huge country, however, was under British rule for two hundred years, gaining independence on August 15, 1947. This has led to Fernando Pessoa being a well-known literary figure in Goa while he was unheard of in the erstwhile British India. Luckily, this situation started changing when the Portuguese Cultural Centre of the Embassy of Portugal was established in New Delhi in 1990, after the renewal of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1975, and now Pessoa's poetry is part of the curriculum for undergraduate and postgraduate courses in one of the leading departments of English in the country. In spite of this change for the better, there has so far been no anthology of Pessoa's work translated into any Indian language, apart from Konkani.¹ The three books in Hindi being reviewed here are the only exceptions.² In that sense, Sharad Chandra, the translator of the first and third books and the co-translator and editor of the second, has done a wonderful job.

* Rita Ray taught Portuguese in Jadavpur University, Kolkata, from 2007-2015 under an agreement between the University and Camões I.P. of Portugal.

¹ India has 22 scheduled languages besides two official languages, namely, English and Hindi. Konkani, one of the scheduled languages and the official language of Goa, almost "died" under the Portuguese dispensation, since the colonizers tried to replace it with Portuguese in all spheres of life and were successful to a large extent. After the Liberation of Goa in December 1961, Konkani has been nurtured back to life. Due to historical reasons, a great deal of Portuguese literature has been translated into Konkani, including the works of Fernando Pessoa.

² In 1995 (i.e., two years before the first of these three books was published), *Bish shataker portugeej kobita* had come out in Kolkata. It was an anthology of poems by six twentieth-century Portuguese poets, translated into Bengali, which included about ten of Pessoa's poems.

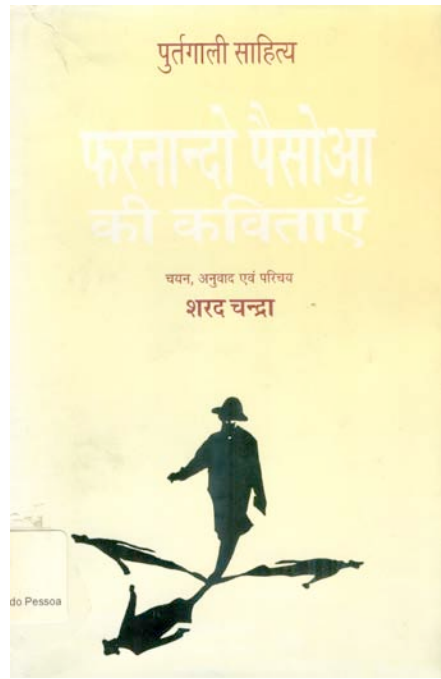


Fig. 1. *Fernando Pessoa ki kavitayen* [*The poems of Fernando Pessoa*] (1997)

Chandra is an Indian scholar of French and Francophone literatures with a formidable body of work, both original and translation. According to her biographical blurb in the first two books, she has taught English and French literatures at various universities in Nigeria and India. In 1995, the Portuguese Cultural Centre of the Embassy of Portugal, in collaboration with the then Centre of Spanish Studies (the present Centre for Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Latin American Studies) of Jawaharlal Nehru University, organized a two-day international conference on Fernando Pessoa in New Delhi. It was during this conference that Chandra became interested in the works of Fernando Pessoa and made the acquaintance of two foremost Pessoaans, José Blanco and Richard Zenith. That same year, Chandra travelled to Lisbon on a fellowship from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation with the goal of studying Pessoa's work.

The result of that short stay in Lisbon was the book that came out in 1997—*Fernando Pessoa ki kavitayen* (*'The Poems of Fernando Pessoa'*) (Fig. 1). This book of 167 pages contains a timeline of Pessoa's life, a brief introduction to his poetics, and an explanatory note on his heteronymism. Chandra includes her translation of *O marinheiro* (*'Navik'*) in an appendix as she considers it indispensable for understanding Pessoa's poetics. In two other appendices she gives a list of essential works by and on Pessoa for those who are interested in further reading and a list of the original titles of the poems that were translated in the anthology. The main body of the anthology has nineteen poems by Álvaro de Campos, twelve by Albert Caeiro, six by Ricardo Reis, six excerpts from the *Livro do Dessassossego*, and twenty-four poems by Pessoa himself.

Though the selection includes many of the well-known poems, it is somewhat limited by the fact that the translator does not know Portuguese and had to depend on poems that had already been translated by other scholars into French or English. As has already been mentioned, in Appendix 3 she gives a list of the original titles of the translated poems. This list mentions only the first line in English or French, but does not state whether the poem in question has been translated from the original Portuguese or from these translations.³ Chandra, however, does not explain how she has translated the rest of the poems without any knowledge of Portuguese. This is in fact the majority of the poems, since the translator claims to have translated only twenty-one poems or pieces, out of a total of sixty-seven, from a French or English translation. Nor does she cite, in the case of the poems in original Portuguese, the anthology or edition from which they have been taken.

The selection of pieces is somewhat problematic as well. According to the cover, the 'selection, translation, and introduction' (*chayan, anuvad evam parichay*) were done by Chandra, and in her preface ("Nivedan") (PESSOA, 1997: 7) she says that "a selection, being a selection, can never be impartial, but since this is a first-ever collection of the poet's poems in Hindi, I have selected the poems not on the basis of my liking but keeping in mind the variety and excellence of the poet's art."⁴ This is true to a large extent—but there are also notable absences.

As has been mentioned above, Chandra includes a translation of the static drama *O Marinheiro*—though this is an anthology of poems—since it is considered indispensable while discussing Pessoa's oeuvre. Following the same logic, "Impressões do crepúsculo" and "Chuva oblíqua" should have also been included, or at least some sections of the latter, as Richard Zenith has done in *A Little Larger Than the Entire Universe* (2006). A short excerpt⁵ (seven lines) of "Na floresta do alheamento" has been included, however. This inclusion, along with that of five more short excerpts (all of them translated from Richard Zenith's *The Book of Disquietude*, published in 1991) under the heading of Bernardo Soares, is quite surprising. If *O marinheiro*, as a play, is placed in an appendix, then logically the

³ For example: "I'm beginning to know myself. I don't exist", from the English translation by Honig & Brown (PESSOA, 1986: 100) or "Si vous voulez que j'ai quelque mysticism", from the French translation by Michel Chandeigne & Patrick Quillier (PESSOA, 1989: 54-55); or "Gods are happy" (Eng. tr. Richard Zenith, not published).

⁴ Translation from Hindi by the reviewer.

⁵ "Alagav ke aranya mein" (PESSOA, 1997: 104): "O movimento parado das árvores; o sossego inquieto das fontes; o hálito indefinível do ritmo íntimo das seivas; o entardecer lento das coisas, que parece vir-lhes de dentro a dar mãos de concordância espiritual ao entristecer longínquo, e próximo à alma, do alto silêncio do céu; o cair das folhas, compassado e inútil, pingos de alheamento, em que a paisagem se nos torna toda para os ouvidos e se entristece em nós com uma pátria recordada – tudo isto, como um cinto a desatar-se, cingia-nos, incertamente" (PESSOA, 1998b: 459).

excerpts from *Disquiet* should also have been placed in an appendix instead of in the main body of the anthology of poems. Why are the prose excerpts by Bernardo Soares present in the main body unless the translator considers them to be prose poems (as does the reviewer)? Chandra does not shed any light on her choice in this regard. The non-inclusion of any English poems by Pessoa is even more surprising.

Having discussed Chandra's selection of the poems, I now turn to the translations themselves. They should not be judged on the basis of accuracy since, on the whole, they are translations of translations. But what about the language chosen for translation? Though Hindi is the only "Indian" language⁶ declared official by India's constitution, it is not a very mellifluous language—unless more Persian and Arabic vocables are used rather than their Sanskrit equivalents. It is not a language that can boast of a corpus of classical literature, as in the case of Tamil, Malayalam, or Bengali, to name just a few. Chandra uses the heavily Sanskritised version of Hindi that makes the language very wooden and robs the translations of fluidity and spontaneity.

The translation of one title is rather controversial. "Tabacaria" has been translated as "Pan ki dukan," or betel leaf shop. It is an attempt at acculturation on the translator's part. She could have made it "Sigret ki dukan" or "pan-sigret ki dukan" (literally, "cigarette shop"). In the same poem, she translates "pequena" ("Come chocolates, pequena") as "chhoti ladki," or little girl. This is possibly because she has translated this poem from the English version, where Richard Zenith translates the line as "Eat your chocolates, little girl" (PESSOA, 1998a: 175); had she translated directly from the original Portuguese, she probably would have used *bacchi*, which would have been more accurate and sounded more natural. Incidentally, "Tabacaria" is one of the poems that Chandra has not made clear from which edition or language it was translated. There are quite a few typographical errors in the original Portuguese titles (e.g., "Tabaccaria," "Ela conta [sic] pobre ceifeira"). Besides, all the Portuguese proper nouns, without any exception, have been misspelled in Hindi (e.g., Jossay Blenko).

The strongest part of the anthology is '[t]he introduction' (*Ek parichay*) (PESSOA, 1997: 16-26). It shows that Chandra has really grasped the phenomenon of heteronymism and, using her academic experience, makes quite a praiseworthy effort to make Indian readers understand it. On the other hand, there is a glaring error in the timeline of Pessoa's biography: Chandra mentions that in 1906 Pessoa returned to Durban for a short vacation. The fact that after arriving in Lisbon in 1905 Pessoa never again ventured out of Portugal is quite well-known. Chandra repeats this error in both her second and third collections of translations of

⁶ "Indian" language here means a language that originated within the geographical confines of India, i.e. Hindi. Indian English is now one of the many recognized variants of English.

Fernando Pessoa's works, *Atma ki khoj* and *Ek bechain ka roznamcha*, which came out in 2005 and 2007, respectively. In the latter, this grave mistake is compounded by an even greater one, for she states that Pessoa was born in 1890. Returning to the first book, there is another important error, one of omission. In 1996, Pessoa's work once more came under copyright and remained so until 2005. But there is no mention in the book whether permission was sought from Pessoa's heirs for translating his works. In spite of all its shortcomings, on the whole, *Fernando Pessoa ki kavitaen* is a very laudable effort, in that it is the first—and until now the only—effort in India, outside Goa,⁷ to present Fernando Pessoa's poetry to Indian readers in an anthology.



Fig. 2. *Atma ki khoj*
[‘Search for soul’] (2005)

The second book under review, *Atma ki khoj* (‘Search for soul’), is a selection of Pessoa's prose (Fig. 2). The majority of its 288 pages (PESSOA, 2005: 11-172) is made up of translations from Richard Zenith's *The Book of Disquietude* (1991). *O marinheiro* (‘Navik’) makes a reappearance in this book, but this time it is placed in the main body. The rest of the texts are excerpts from Pessoa's writings on literature and arts (‘Sahitya aur kala,’; PESSOA, 2005: 173-208), on orthonymism and heteronymism (‘Swanam aur parnamon ke bare mein,’; PESSOA, 2005: 209-235), and his letters and interviews (‘Patra aur sakshatkar’; PESSOA, 2005: 235-264). There is also an appendix (‘Parishishta,’; PESSOA, 2005: 287-288) containing a short primary and secondary bibliography. In the preface, Chandra mentions that only a few initial

⁷ Cf. *Sondesh*, a translation into Konkani of Fernando Pessoa's *Mensagem*, by Olivinho Gomes (1990).

pieces of *Disquietude* (*Bechain jeevan*) and *O Marinheiro* (*Navik*) are her own translations, while Durga Prasad Shukla has collaborated with her in translating the rest. She does not specify which excerpts were translated by her and which were translated jointly. Nor is there any information about Shukla. This certainly is a grave omission and lack of professional transparency.

There are other such omissions throughout the book. For instance, Chandra does not indicate the source or the Portuguese titles of the pieces that have been translated in the second and third sections (“Sahitya aur kala” and “Swanam aur parnamon ke bare mein,” respectively). Except for the *Disquietude* pieces, which the editor has clearly mentioned as having been taken from Zenith’s 1991 edition, there is no information regarding the source and language of the prose pieces that make up rest of the book, including *O marinheiro*. Regarding the Hindi translations, I shall again refrain from commenting on their accuracy for the reason I have already mentioned above, while repeating my opinion about the variant of Hindi used.

I shall also reiterate that despite all its drawbacks, this book presents to the Hindi-reading public a glimpse into the mind of the enigma that was Fernando Pessoa. Another redeeming feature of this book is the inclusion of two sketches of Pessoa by Júlio Pomar and Lima de Freitas, along with the famous painting by Almada Negreiros (although in black and white here).

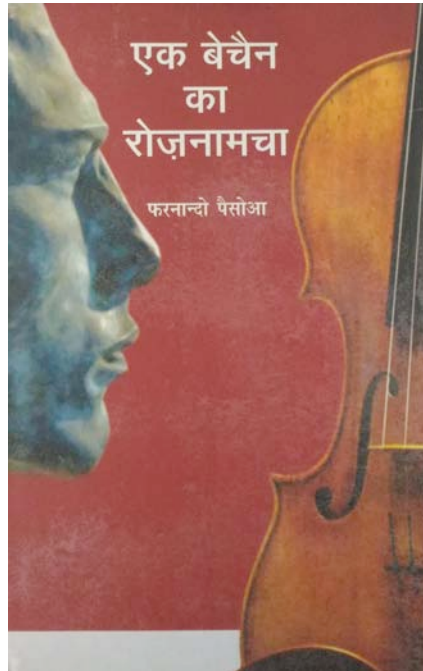


Fig. 3. *Ek bechain ka roznamcha* [*Diary of a restless person*] (2007)

The third book, *Ek bechain ka roznamcha* (*Diary of a restless person*), published in 2007, is the slimmest (Fig. 3). This Hindi translation of Richard Zenith’s 1991

edition of *The Book of Disquietude*⁸ does not have an index and is made up of a preface ("Pesh labz"; PESSOA, 2007: 5-6)⁹, an introduction ("Is dastabez ke bare mein"; PESSOA, 2007: 7-9)¹⁰, and the main body. The main body is comprised of excerpts from 518 pieces and of a timeline of Pessoa's life. There is also an appendix of primary and secondary bibliography.

Chandra states that "from this mysterious (wooden) trunk (overflowing with sealed envelopes)" (PESSOA, 2007: 7)¹¹ a book was prepared and published in 1991: *The Book of Disquietude*, a "collection of the descriptions of dreams of a totally restless youth and the opinions articulated by him" (PESSOA, 2007: 7). She continues: "In 1913, when he first published under his own name his first literary prose 'In the Forest of Estrangement,' he also announced that it was the opening section of *The Book of Disquietude*, the book he was then writing" (PESSOA, 2007: 17). The fact is, Pessoa wrote and published "Na floresta do alheamento" and planned a *Livro do desassossego* that was first published forty-seven years after his death, in 1982. Chandra should have used the Portuguese titles for both the fragment and the proposed book and then given a Hindi or English (preferably Hindi) translation of the same within brackets. Next she goes on to give an example of Pessoa's outline for the book; this time all the titles are in Hindi, and the outline itself has been taken from Zenith (1991). In this scheme number four is listed as "Tirchi barish" ("Chuva oblíqua") (PESSOA, 2007: 8), whereas it should be "Sone ki barish" ("Chuva de oiro") (PESSOA, 2007: 17).

Once more, I shall refrain from commenting about the Hindi translations for reasons that should by now be clear, and I shall reiterate my opinion about the variant of Hindi used. After the first two books, this book does not contribute in any way to the knowledge and appreciation of Pessoa's work for readers of Hindi.

⁸ Chandra presents this book as a translation of Zenith's *The Book of Disquietude*; never once does she refer to the original *Livro do desassossego*. She even asserts that the fragments were published in book form for the first time in 1991 as *The Book of Disquietude*, thereby completely ignoring Jacinto do Prado Coelho's 1982 edition of the original Portuguese (PESSOA, 2007: 7).

⁹ Roughly translated as 'a few words.'

¹⁰ About this document.

¹¹ First sentence of the first paragraph of the introduction.

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