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**The Case of the Curious Comestible
from Bengali into English:
Rendering Sarcasm, Polysemy,
Ambiguity, and Connotation
by Direct Translation, Footnoting,
Transliteration, and Addition**

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The Case of the Curious Comestible from Bengali into English: Conveying Sarcasm, Polysemy, Ambiguity, and Connotation by Direct Translation, Footnoting, Transliteration, and Addition

I reflect here on the apparently simple options open to a translator who aims for cross-linguistic/cultural clarity: directly translating source language words into the target language (with and without inverted commas), retaining them in transliteration, explaining them in footnotes, and inserting unmarked additional words (a few or many) as seems best. Since circumstances alter cases, I explain why in one place I exercised the freedom to choose translation and footnoting with regard to a set of three literal Bengali sweetmeats (two of them with figurative names), while in another place I chose to combine all the options in relation to the figurative word for (what is most likely) a Bengali sweetmeat used as a metaphor. All these sweetmeats are in my volume *Fantasy Fictions from the Bengal Renaissance* (OUP, 2018).

The first set of sweetmeats (*mug-er nāru. kheerer chhānch, moti-chur methāi*) appears in Abanindranath Tagore's *Kheerer Putul, The Make-Believe Bridegroom* (Chs. 21, 22). I translated this set with a footnote, no transliteration and five additional words (italicised below), thus:

With that poison the Younger Queen wrought *sweet* lentil-globules,
fudge-textured sweetmeats of thickened milk made in *decorative* moulds,
“*pearlbead-powder*” dainties.

The second sweetmeat (*lāl-mohan*) appears in a metaphor in Gaganendranath Tagore's *Bhondar Bahadur, Toddy-Cat the Bold* (Ch. 5). I translated *and* transliterated it with a footnote and added many additional words and phrases (italicised below), turning ten words into thirty, thus:

The Parrot-Saheb became frightfully angry, *and a dear, charming* sight he

made as he flushed with rage, and went as dark red as the “blushing-beloved, fascinating” lal-mohan sweetmeat.

The “‘pearl’-/‘pearl-bead-powder’” dainties’ were condemned by a reviewer in an Indian newspaper as an instance of the many such needless ‘mouthfuls’ that ‘mar’ my translation, an incomprehensible choice of ‘transliteration’ (a slip of the pen for ‘literal translation’?), since, inconsistently, the transliterated sweetmeat name ‘lal-mohan’ was ‘retained...with the necessary footnote.’¹ The short explanation is that *lāl-mohan* was retained in italicised transliteration because it is unusual in being a sweetmeat name that is also a personal name (along with North Indian *rabṛi* and Bengali nickname *cham-cham*), and transliteration (even sans capital letters and inverted commas) might evoke some of its many resonances to the pan-South Asian Anglophone reader of the volume.

As to ‘mouthfuls’, *all* four sweetmeats in the volume are directly translated in the body of the text, along with footnotes with their names in the source language and clarifications of their nature.² All but *moti-chur* include additional words for relative clarity as one reads. Thus, in the text *muger nāru* is ‘sweet lentil-globules’, *kheerer chhanch* is ‘fudge-textured sweetmeats of thickened milk made in decorative moulds’, *moti-chur methai* is “‘pearl-bead-powder’ dainties’, and *lāl-mohan* is ‘the “blushing-beloved, fascinating” lal-mohan sweetmeat’. So the translation of *lāl-mohan* is as clear and present a mouthful as the others, and to be deplored quite as much.

¹ ‘Books: Paperback Pickings: Worlds Come Together: *Fantasy Fictions...*’, *Telegraph (Kolkata)*, 31 May 2019, <<https://epaper.telegraphindia.com/calcutta/2019-05-31/71/Page-15.html>>.

² Here are the footnotes. On the first triplet of sweetmeats, ‘The golden-gram laddu (here, *muger nāru*); the *kheerer chhanch* (the thickened-milk equivalent of the cottage-cheese based sandesh); the Bengal gram-flour *mihidana* ball (called in the text the *motichur*, “pearl-powder”). This is the very first time the word “*kheer*” appears, and as such I have added clarifying words: see preface and introduction. On decorative moulds for sweetmeats...’ etc. (119). On the metaphor for the redness of an angry face (the tenor), which seems to me to indicate a red sweetmeat as its primary point of comparison (the vehicle), but also to use a word with other possible ambiguous/polysemous referents which fit the context. ‘A Bengali syrup-soaked delight, another one made out of thickened milk, akin to the North Indian gulab-jamun’ (283).

The inverted commas in the main text of translated *moti-chur* and of *lāl-mohan* are intended to signal that the names of these sweetmeats have names which are poetic metaphors rather than directly descriptive ones. (The *kheerer chhānch* involves metonymy, since these thickened-milk sweetmeats are named after the moulds they are made in and are not the moulds themselves, but rendering the metonymy into explanation seemed to make for ease of reading.)

The translations of both *moti-chur* and *lāl-mohan* are-intended to defamiliarise rather than to familiarise these items for the Anglophone reader of any sort. This is a *Bengali* text in translation, and these are *Bengali* sweetmeats, though some have variations and different names elsewhere in India. The Bengali words for them would *not* be followed by all non-Bengali Indian readers. The long phrases of translation of the Bengali words look difficult, but are nevertheless decodable with a little effort, and are intended to remind all readers that that they are reading a *translation*, a text from another culture at a lesser or greater remove from their own, and that these items are relatively specific to the culture of the source-language. My volume is directed to both a non-Bengali pan-Indian Anglophone audience, part but *not all* of which might follow some easy-option transliterations, which presuppose readerly knowledge, and to a foreign one, which certainly would not follow any of them.³ A translation cannot be identical to the source; and some room to manoeuvre must be allowed when it comes to conveying a sense of culturally specific matters unfamiliar to the target audience, or a part of it. When the nature of a culturally specific item is relatively clear from its name ([sweet] lentil globules, moulded thickened-milk [sweetmeats]) with a little additional unmarked clarification, well and good; when it is not, a transliteration is probably *quite* as incomprehensible as a translation of its name to much of *both* audiences.

³ There is also the matter of potential subsets of child-audiences for the main texts if not the apparatus, since these texts are ‘children’s literature’ as well as literature: see ‘Reinbert Tabbert, ‘Approaches to the Translation of Children’s Literature: A Review of Critical Studies since 1960’, *Target*, 14:2, 2002, 303–351.

Both transliteration and translation might convey an equally exotic *feel* for some but transliteration would have a more exotic *look*. Thus when it is a choice between incomprehensibilities in relation to the same bewildering unfamiliar/exotic thing in the body of a translation, better a less incomprehensible mouthful of translation which makes the reader pause and puzzle it out than an even more incomprehensible morsel of transliteration. A translation of a difficult meaning seems preferable to a transliteration of an exotic word. When there is a specific reason to include both translation and transliteration (e.g. *lāl-mohan* as *also* a proper name for a person), both can be used. Culturally specific things can indeed be explained/clarified by separate footnotes which direct the reader away from the main text, but some culturally specific things can be easily clarified with additional unmarked words inserted into the body of the translation. I usually translate in text, transliterate in footnotes, though not in the case of *lāl-mohan*. I explain in either text or footnotes or both, wherever such explanation seemed less jarring. I felt that there was no need to do the same thing every time, so I did not do it. My bewildered reviewer might not subscribe to my assumptions or accept the justifications for my choices; but I hope you do.

The unmarked words added to the main text for clarification are probably even more to be condemned than the incomprehensibility of bulky mouthfuls, on the grounds of lack of ‘fidelity to the source text’. *Lāl-mohan* is not just the sole translated-then-transliterated sweetmeat name in the main text, it is also the sole instance of including many additional words, so that the words of the source expand threefold in the translation.

More general semantic and aesthetic questions arise from the translator’s options of translation/transliteration/footnoting/addition, and that translator’s duty to discriminate and choose the best combination in context with a fluid, *inconsistent*, differential use of techniques: ‘Is the translator allowed only translation or transliteration, or both in special cases?’; ‘If so, must they always be presented consistently, in the same order?’; ‘How much inconsistency of translational technique

is allowed; must each inconsistency be explained?'; to 'Where do explanations/clarifications best go; must they always be in the same place?'; 'How does one translate culturally specific words?'; 'How does one translate linguistic ambiguity, secondary parallel meanings, cultural connotations, and sarcasm without tipping into literary-critical interpretation?'; 'How many potential ambiguities etc. does one leave out?' and 'How many clarifying unmarked additional words are allowed in a translation, and when?'⁴

The general principles and method

In my introduction, I justify my use of different translations and different kinds of translation of the same thing, e.g. 'ululation' translated differently in the two narratives, and my sense of 'useful inconsistency'. I say that explanation of all culturally-specific matters comes in unmarked explanatory phrases inserted into the text proper where possible, in footnotes when unavoidable, and I spell out the principle of translation over transliteration in the main text (on the grounds that potential sense-and-meaning, even if bewildering, trump exotic look-and-sound). The prime exception to 'translate over transliterate' is the proper name, which in the text proper *must* be transliterated first, with immediate translation after it. This is a technique particularly useful for rendering type names for stock figures and places (e.g., in *Bhondar Bahadur* 'Buddhimanta the Wise' renders the Hare Minister), and for special cases when a term seems to be both a common noun denoting a class and a proper name for a member of that class (e.g., in *Bhondar Bahadur* 'Tal-Betal-siddha Lathi, Ghoulie-Ghostie-Magic Mastery Staff').

The triplet of sweetmeats in *Kheerer Putul* is a set of literal objects which actually appear in the narrative. Taking them in reverse order, the sweetmeat called the *moti-chur* is the only one of these named with a poetic metaphor, the 'beads of

⁴ I apologise for the potential confusion involved below with the short *a* and long \bar{a} , for the retroflex *r* (*d*), and for my retention of *ee* for the long \bar{i} in *kheer* (which is how my volume rendered it). Sanskrit words retain the terminal short *a*, others do not. Following day-to-day practice, the components of compound personal names are separated, start with capital letters, and have no diacritical marks.

powdered pearls’ sweetmeat. Hence this name gets inverted commas in the translated text when it first appears and is truncated and expanded thereafter. The other two sweetmeats, the *kheerer chhanch*, sweetmeats ‘of thickened milk made in decorative moulds’, and the *muger nāru*, ‘lentil-globules’, have names which directly denote their nature. So, in the body of the translated narrative they get direct translations without inverted commas, and an unmarked additional explanatory word each, ‘fudge-textured’ and ‘sweet’. These are poisoned sweetmeats, presents offered by an inferior, the sweetness of which carries intended death. The *kheerer chhanch* are of the same material as the moulded figure which brings to birth a crucial new life later in the story, the same new life which these sweetmeats had intended to kill along with its mother. The *kheerer chhanch* foreshadows and counterpoints the kheer figure. Similarly, since the *moti-chur* sweetmeats ‘are’ pearls ground down to powder’, i.e. destroyed, and then reconstituted as beads in a new whole, the life they were intended to kill (the mother) is almost destroyed and then the new life is ‘reconstituted’ to come to magical birth (for all this, read the text).⁵ Thus, in *Kheerer Putul* there are potential narrative ironies relating to its actual, literal sweetmeats of death at the level of the *plot*, for a critic to address.

Contrarywise, in *Bhondar Bahadur* there is irony/sarcasm regarding the probable sweetmeat referent of the metaphor-word at the level of the *sentence*, as well as the word’s semantic ambiguity/polysemy, all for a translator to address and to convey as best they can. For in *Bhondar Bahadur*, in a metaphor for anger made manifest, the tenor of an anger-reddened face has as what seems to me to be its most likely vehicle the *lāl-mohan* as a red sweetmeat (the referent most commonly found in dictionaries), ‘red’ only by courtesy, actually darkish glowing-brown. While a metaphor by definition draws on a similarity between unlike things, in this metaphor in *Bhondar*

⁵ The second peer reviewer informed me that “Moti” is in ‘Bengali a common informal name for boys; if so, I have never heard it nor seen the word referred to as such. So as not to leave the poor *muger nāru* out, wild eisegesis might make these recall the *nāru*-balls ‘of sesame-jaggery or coconut-jaggery or khoa-kheer-and-jaggery’ — or even these lentils? — which are part of the main day of worship of child-giving dea ex machina Shashthi, might represent the children in her womb (my volume, 46), and might also thus — at a stretch — correspond ironically to her gift of the child in *Kheerer Putul*.

Bahadur, there is also a meaningful *contrast* between tenor and vehicle, and the contrast goes beyond more than just the most obvious vehicle, but the others as well.

As indicated above, just as no ‘sweetmeat’ is mentioned with the *muger naru* and the *kheerer chhanch* (hence the additional ‘sweet’ and ‘sweetmeats’ with them even though that is what they obviously are), let me underline that no ‘sweetmeat’ is mentioned in the *lāl-mohan* sentence in *Bhondar Bahadur*. It reads ‘The Parrot Saheb, growing frightfully angry, assumed the appearance/form [*rup*] of *lāl-mohan*’ and despite one of the simplest meanings of the word *lāl* in Bengali being ‘anger’, the little matter of *-mohan* means that the sentence *cannot* be rendered ‘The Parrot Saheb...turned red/red-attractive/a red-attractive figure’ in an overt manifestation of the emotion of anger. The compound word *lāl-mohan* is not, as far as I know or can find, usually or ordinarily used or understood to describe an angry person. Hence the compound here cannot but be a metaphor, and implies at least one separate referent. Turning that metaphor into a simile and spelling out its connotations in the main text seemed to be the best way to proceed.

And we here leave behind the newspaper review’s faint damns along with the *moti-chur* and its fellows. This is a note on the semantic range, the choices involved and the technique used (inverted-comma translation + transliteration + footnoting + *much* unmarked addition) in translating *lāl-mohan* and *lāl-mohan* only. As I said above, this ‘red’ sweetmeat is the one most commonly referred to as that referent for the compound word *lāl-mohan* in dictionaries (hence the one most in popular use?), and thus the most likely referent which the ‘common reader’ would take for granted that the text implies. But there are at least two *other* referents (dark incarnate divinity Krishna and red parrot) which also perfectly fit the textual context. These three referents involve at least four distinct etymologies (red, ruby, dear-child/ dear-lover, spittle). These four etymologies underpin the culturally inflected connotations of both parts of the compound, therefore in this discussion etymologies and connotations alike *also* deserve consideration in context. The positive connotations (sweetness,

value, dearness, beauty, divinity, mouth-watering delectability, the entrancing) are in sarcastic contrast with an angrily ruby-red yelling Parrot; contrariwise the negative ones (a nauseating spoilt mother's darling raging in infantile dribbling idiocy and lack of control) are in perfect accord with him.

I detail below all these referents, etymologies, and connotations which work together at some level in the narratorial sarcasm (as it seems to me) of the sentence. I attempt to cover all bases, and so I also apologise for the potential confusion caused by the various referents, the heavy-handedness in treating them, and the debris of dismissed or eliminated possibilities involved. But at whatever level, a sense of all these referents etc. is automatically part of the linguistic culture of the readers of the original text, and not that of Anglophone ones. Hence at the cost of driving my present reader down too many tortuous paths at once, I detail how I attempted to include a sense of what seemed to be the most important shades of meaning and why I left out the others.

Though the reasons probably differ from mine, there is a contemporaneous precedent (1908) for treating the name of the *lāl-mohan* sweetmeat as a special case within inverted commas in a list of sweetmeats in Bengali itself: ‘...*sandesh, rasagollā, pāntoā* [sic] [,] *jilipi, amriti, “lālmohan”, “kheer-mohan”*’ (Roy, 90), probably only because of the assumed recency of these two from after c. 1870. The *lāl-mohan* sweetmeat is one of the many variations/descendants of the dark brown *pāntoā/pāntuā* sweetmeat, both syrup soaked and both usually based on *chhānā*, cottage cheese. Both descend from the light creamy-orangey-brown *kheer-mohan* sweetmeat, possibly based on *khoa (khoa-kheer)*, heat-reduced milk-solids, an older and ‘purer’ material than cottage cheese. All three are said to originate in late nineteenth-century Bengal, but the *kheer-mohan* is disputedly a c.12th century temple-offering from neighbouring state Odisha, there also always made out of *chhānā*.⁶

⁶ Soumendra Nath Biswas, *Developing food as a marketing tool for the growth of hospitality and tourism industry in India with special reference to West Bengal*, University of Burdwan Ph.d. thesis, 2009, at <<http://hdl.handle.net/10603/61925>>, Ch. 4, ‘Characteristics and Preparation of Bengali Cuisine’ at <https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/61925/13/13_chapter%204.pdf>, 144-145. On

Multiple Referents, Polysemy, Ambiguity, Cultural Connotation/ Suggestion

There are many compound words in Sanskrit, formed on complicated grammatical rules, fewer and shorter in the modern Indian languages (like *moti-chur* and *lāl-mohan*) where they usually follow the patterns inherited from Sanskrit.

Sometimes the compounds have multiple referents or allow for several interpretations. Play with multiple meanings merged in a single word or phrase, *slesha*, is integral to classical Sanskrit literature (some texts simultaneously tell two different stories by using it). But *slesha* is much less a feature in the literature of the modern Indian languages and daily speech, so we may draw instead upon Sanskrit poetics for the useful notion of *dhwani*, verbal suggestion of parallel secondary meanings, for modern polysemous or potentially ambiguous words with multiple referents, and for cultural semantic connotation. In *Bhondaṛ Bahadur*, polysemous *lāl-mohan* is probably not a deliberate *slesha*-pun, but — regardless of 'plain meaning' or Gaganendranath's intentions — it is suggestively ambiguous, and that ambiguity calls for translation.

The two components of the compound *lāl-mohan*, both grammatically masculine, are in one interpretation 'almost companionate words' (*sahachar shabda*: Bidyanidhi), semantic doublets or equivalents mirroring each other. In one of its senses *lāl*, noun and adjective, means 'dear', hence 'beautiful' etc. And *mohan*, noun and adjective, means 'that which/he who entrances, captivates', 'entrancing; enchanting, bewitching; confusing, bewildering, perplexing, puzzling; deluding, leading astray; stupefying,

khoa-kheer-/chhana-based sweetmeats see K. T. Achaya. *Indian Food: A Historical Companion*, New Delhi: O.U.P., 1994. Caveat emptor on the local origins, antiquity, materials of Indic sweetmeats. The *lālmohan* as 'a sweetmeat like the *pāntuā*' (<accessibledictionary.gov.bd>: Bengali-to-Bengali) is 'made of curd' i.e. *chhānā* at <accessibledictionary.gov.bd>: Bengali-to-English), or 'made of *kheer*', i.e. *khoā* (Bidyanidhi). Current Wikipedia entries on North Indian *gulab jamun*, *khoa*-based, see the *pāntuā* as its Bengali variation, and the *pāntuā* itself as *chhānā*-based. On Odisha *kheer-mohan*, see Anita Sabat, 'Rasagola – History, Culture and the Brand – III' at <https://www.odisha.plus/2019/10/rasagola-history-culture-and-the-brand-iii-by-anita-sabat/>; Srijana Mitra Das, 'Bengal vs Odisha: Whose *rosogolla* is it anyway?' at <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/rosogolla-rasagolla-gi-registration-west-bengal-kolkata-mamata-banerjee-odisha-4940907/>; Bishwabijoy Mitra. 'Who invented the *rasgulla*?' at <https://recipes.timesofindia.com/articles/features/who-invented-the-rasgulla/articleshow/47909754.cms>. On a *chhānā*-like based *rice-flour pāntuā*-like sweetmeat in 12th century South India: see Michael Kronl, *Sweet Invention: A History of Dessert*, Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2011, 41-42.

hypnotising; tempting, seducing, infatuating, fascinating'; 'states of trance, enchantment...' etc., embarrassment (as a result?), the acts of causing these states, the act of sexual intercourse, etc. Hence in the compound *lāl-mohan*, regarded as a pair of mirror-words, *lāl* is 'dear' and *-mohan* is primarily 'entrancer'. But *lāl* is very polysemous indeed, with the neutral meaning of red and contrapuntal connotations of inflexions of positive affection (dearness, high-value, mouth-watering delectability) and negative contempt (a mother's darling, lack of control). While the meanings of *mohan* go from entrancing to stupefying, the range is much narrower.

In *Bhondar Bahadur* the angry Parrot Saheb grows as red as a certainly metaphorical *lāl-mohan* (most probably as sweetmeat); he also becomes infantile, irrational, babbling, and altogether unattractive, which the negative connotations of the word *lāl-mohan* can covertly suggest and underpin. One might speculate that Gaganendranath chose a 'red-attractive' sweetmeat for his metaphor in a fantasy narrative for children precisely because of the contrast between red-attractive appealing 'sweetness' and the red-angry *unappealing* repulsiveness of the being to whom it is applied.

None of the dictionaries consulted seem to give all the meanings of *lāl-mohan* or even *lāl*, so ('old-school' though this move is) we now turn to the various referents, etymologies, and connotations/*dhwani*-suggestions of *lāl-mohan* which warranted my special treatment. My focus here on these features and their semantic implications, all relevant to the *lāl-mohan* metaphor, are *not* directed to the pan-Indian Anglophone portion of the intended audience of my volume, but to readers of this article on translation, who might be interested in the range of meanings and connotations from which I had to choose, and how those meanings and connotations arise. Part of my stress on these features here necessitates my use of the words *tatsama*, 'that-same', for a Sanskrit loanword, and *tadbhava*, 'that-like', for a Sanskrit-derived word (evolved through Middle Indo-Aryan and thence into modern Indo-Aryan languages), and my emphasis on the 'Hindiness' of *some* connotations

of *lāl*. (Lexicographical sources for the following analysis are all noted in parenthesis; for full details, please see the bibliography.)

The ‘Plain Meaning’: Referent 1 [sweetmeat]: Neutral *Dhwani*-Suggestion by Etymology 1 (red): The angry Parrot looks as red as a ‘red-entrancer’ sweetmeat
Probably from one or more of the Middle Eastern languages, Persian and Turkish *lāl* (*lāl* 2, <<https://accessibledictionary.gov.bd>>), the Persian- derived Arabicized form *la’l* (see Qureshpor et al.), then through Urdu/Hindi,⁷ *lāl* is the ordinary and completely naturalised Bengali word for ‘red’, with no sense of a ‘foreign’ etymological weight, though it is probably *not* from any suggested origin in Sanskrit *lohita* as ‘red, reddish’ (*lāl* 2, <<https://accessibledictionary.gov.bd>>) or any other Sanskrit root (Bidyanidhi). So when the angry Parrot Saheb takes on the appearance of a ‘red-entrancer’, he ‘obviously’ takes on the ‘red-entrancer’ appearance of the sweetmeat named *lāl-mohan*.

Referent 1 [sweetmeat]: Positive *Dhwani*-Suggestion 1 by Etymology 2 (ruby): The angry Parrot looks as rubicund as a ‘valuable gem entrancer’ sweetmeat
But *lāl* also means ‘ruby’ in what seem unequivocally to be its Middle Eastern languages of origin in this sense, and in Hindi/Urdu too (whether the gem-word is the source of the colour-word or vice versa is unclear). But though Bengali has *lāl* as ruby, it is not the ordinary Bengali word for ruby (which is *chuni*), and in this sense *lāl* carries a North Indian feel. Anyhow, the angry Parrot Saheb takes on the rubicund appearance of a ‘ruby-entrancer’ sweetmeat with a name which carries connotations of both the colour and the high *value* of the North Indian name of a precious stone.

Referent 2 [person]: Positive *Dhwani*-Suggestion by Etymology 3 (dear infant son): The angry Parrot looks as red as a ‘dear infant son entrancer’ [cf. Referent 3, incarnate divinity]

⁷ In Urdu — which is written in the Persian script modified to accommodate other sounds from Arabic *and* in the languages which use the Devanagari scripts — depending on what the transcriber made of *lāl*, it would be transcribed as Persian *lāl* (for red, ruby and for Sanskrit-derived son) or Arabic *la’l* (for red ruby). Devanagari and similar scripts render all three meanings with *lāl*, and the relevant languages pronounce the word accordingly.

One dictionary specifically defines the *lāl-mohan* sweetmeat *without* ‘red’ or ‘ruby-red’, as ‘[(dear)...(attractive) very dear foodstuff], particular sweetmeat’ (Das). Thus *lāl-mohan* with companionate redoubling is here ‘dear-entrancing’ (foodstuff). But since that dearness is specifically that of an infant son, the angry Parrot Saheb can be taken either to assume the appearance of a red sweetmeat named ‘dear child’ or directly to assume (sarcastically) the appearance/form of a ‘beloved infant-son entrancer’ *sans* foodstuff (but I think *not* a ‘dear-entrancing’ appearance/form of any entrancing male being in general).

In Sanskrit a child is a *lālanaman* (Apte), from the Sanskrit root \sqrt{lala} as (a) ‘sporting, playful’ (Monier-Williams etc.) hence to play with (and to move to-and-fro), and (b) ‘wishing, desirous’ (Monier-Williams etc.), from which come two related Sanskrit words: *lalana* (ललन) with *lalanam*, play, sport, pastime, pleasure (hence dalliance, etc.), and *lālana* (लालन) with *lālanam*, fondling, caressing (hence coaxing, wheedling) and a host of consequent meanings. With that child, a mother is ‘sporting, playing’ in *lalana*, ‘caressing, fondling, coaxing’ in *lālana*, ‘fondling/caressing’ in related *lālaka*.

Ultimately from these, and always with a sense of endearment (and probably some influence from *lāl* as ‘valuable ruby’) comes Bengali ‘*lāl* 3 (noun) dear one, dear son, infant child’ (<<https://accessibledictionary.gov.bd>>), as derived from ‘(Sanskrit or tatsama) *lāraka*’ (son) — questionable, probably tadbhava⁸ — and ‘(Hindi) *lāl*’ (<<https://accessibledictionary.gov.bd>>). One source (Bidyanidhi) conjectures a *possible* derivation of Bengali *lāl* to be ‘Sanskrit *lālitya* [-?]’, that is, ‘grace, beauty, charm’ (Monier-Williams), which appears in Bengali as ‘n. beauty; sweetness, charm’ (Biswas), so that a *lāl* is a graceful, beautiful charming *being*.

But Bengali *lāl* as ‘dear infant son’ is said also ultimately to derive from Persian ‘dear’ and ‘red’ (Bidyanidhi *lāl* 2), thus proximately from Hindi/Urdu, in which it is a

⁸ I cannot find Sanskrit or tatsama *lāraka*, though such tadbhava words as Western Hindi dialect *larake* and as Eastern Hindi *larakā/larikā* mean ‘sons’: P. D. Gune, *An Introduction To Comparative Philology* (1918), rev. N. P. Gune, Poona: Poona Oriental Book House, 1950, 266.

form of address to and term of particular endearment for a *child*. Thus a mother says to him in these languages ‘*mere lāl*’, ‘my darling’ or refers to him as ‘*lālō kā lāl*’. ‘of dears, the dearest’. In Sanskrit, however, *lālana*, ‘fondling, ... cherishing, coaxing’, through such words as *lālītaka*, favourite, goes in such adult sexual directions as *lālin*, seducer, and *lāla*, another’s wife (all Monier-Williams), *lālan*, ‘mistress’; *lālitya* ‘amorousness’, *lalita*, ‘amorous’, and *lālāsa* with derivatives meaning ‘wanton dance, to lust after, cupidity, etc.’ (Turner). And in the North Indian languages as ‘dear, beloved’, North Indian *lāl* is also a more general term of address to a lover, and ‘*la*’/*lāl* as ‘ruby’ is also ‘the lips (of a mistress)’ (Platts).

But in Bengal these words are not usually used thus (if at all). Thus, despite Sanskrit-derivation of *lāl* and all the related Sanskrit/Bengali words, I claim that in Bengali, tadbhava/Persian-derived *lāl* as ‘dear infant son’ and the Urdu/Hindi *lal-lā* and *lal-lu* are cognates for the Bengali *lālā* as ‘noun. An affectionate term of address to infants’ (<english-bangla>), *lālu*, etc. (vocatives/nicknames rather than common nouns), which are possibly more common in Bengali than *lāl* itself (?), and are *also* known and felt to be North India-redolent words in Bengal. This is relevant here, for the Parrot Saheb is not a ‘mainstream’ Bengali.

Referent 2 [person]: Negative *Dhwani*-Suggestion by Etymology 3 (dear infant son): the angry Parrot as ‘spoilt-child entrancer’

The Sanskrit-derived Bengali word *lālan* is defined as ‘(noun) 1. rearing with extreme care’ (<accessibledictionary.gov.bd>) and it is part of the compound ‘(noun) *lālan-pālan*’, another companionate doublet, ‘tenderly rearing’ (Bidyanidhi). Both take us back to the specific shade of meaning of Sanskrit *lālana*, as ‘the act of caressing, fondling, coaxing, indulging’ (Monier-Williams) which leads to the meaning ‘over-indulgence, fondling too much’ (Apte) and *lālayantam*, ‘coddling’ (Vedabase). Hence a stern Sanskrit warning that indulging a son (*sutalālanam*) is a great fault, whipping/beatng/flogging him a great virtue (Apte). One possible derivation of Bengali *lāl* is ‘Sanskrit *lālita*[-?’] (Bidyanidhi), defined in Bengali as child ‘carefully brought up; carefully reared or tended; fondly cherished’ (Biswas).

So all that caressing and careful rearing of the beloved male child becomes the coddling which leads in Hindi to a potential spoilt *lāl* and to its related Hindi word *lādlā* which has even stronger connotations of spoilt childhood.⁹ In Bengali, the coddling of the dear son leads to a spoilt *dulāl*, ‘Fondling boy; darling; spoilt child’ (<english-bangla.com>) and to two idioms: ‘*dulāl* of the house of an *ālāl*’, ‘a pampered boy or young man of a rich family spoilt by over-indulgence’ (Biswas), and *Nanda-dulāl*, ‘a beloved son of Nanda’ (a form of the personal name ‘Nanda Lal’), which is both ‘an appellation of Krishna’ as ‘Nanda’s darling’ foster-son, and ‘(sarcas.) an over-indulged worthless son’ (Biswas).

Thus through its associations with *dulāl*, the *lāl* of *lāl-mohan* has strong though covert connotations of a spoilt child in the Bengali language itself, and so, since no sweetmeat is mentioned in our text, as the angry Parrot Saheb assumes the appearance of a ‘dear-child entrancer’, a negative undertow suggests that that child is specifically a *spoilt* infant-son *lāl*, with *-mohan* ‘entrancer’ only as sarcastic doubling contranomer.

Referent 1 again [sweetmeat]: Positive *Dhwani*-Suggestion by Etymology 4 (spittle): the angry Parrot turns as red as a ‘mouthwateringly-delectable entrancer’ sweetmeat

The Sanskrit root \sqrt{lala} is ‘to desire’, Sanskrit *lalanā* is ‘the tongue’, *lalana* is ‘lolling the tongue’, *lālāyita* is ‘slobbering, drivelling’ (all Monier-Williams). Sanskrit *lālā* means ‘saliva’ (Monier-Williams), *lālaka* is ‘saliva?’, and *lālā-pāna* is ‘n. sucking of saliva’ (MacDonell) i.e. infantile ‘thumb-sucking’. Bengali *lāl* as cross-referenced with related *lālā* is ‘*lāl* 3. Noun.’ and ‘*lālā* 2. Noun.’, ‘water produced by the

⁹ Thus *lāl* might be derived from Sanskrit \sqrt{lala} and also \sqrt{lara} (Bidyanidhi), ‘to frolic’, ‘fondling, caressing, cherishing’, thus *lāḍana*, ‘n. (and varia lectio for) *lālana*’ (Monier-Williams), ‘rearing’. From \sqrt{lara} comes Hindi *lādlā* and *lārlā*, as ‘a darling, a pet; one tenderly nurtured...; a spoilt child’ (Platts), and ‘*Mā ka lādlā*’, ‘Mother’s darling’. From the \sqrt{lara} root comes Hindi *dulārā*, caress, related to Bengali *dulāl*. Bengali has *lār* as verb ‘to rear’ (Bidyanidhi), but apparently no noun.

mouth' (<english-bangla>) and 'lāl 1. lālā (noun), spittle, mouth-secretion' (<accessibledictionary.gov.bd>).

But the same source simultaneously has Bengali 'lāl 1. lālā as 'Sanskrit or a tatsama lālā' and 'lalmohan (noun), pāntuā-like sweetmeat' derived from 'tatsama or Sanskrit lāra +mohan' (<accessibledictionary.gov.bd>).' I cannot find lāra or lār in Sanskrit and Bengali dictionaries, but liquid consonants -l and -r often turn into each other, and Hindi does indeed have lār and rāl as 'spittle' (Dasa), both probably tadbhava. Retrospective pundit Sanskritising-elevating etymology was not unknown, but this doubtful (White) tadbhava/Hindi lāra derivation or influence in Bengali might be genuine.

Be the spittle from Sanskrit or Hindi, the Bengali lal-mohan sweetmeat is literally Sanskritic lālavat- or lālāvat- and mohan, a 'mouth-watering-entrancer', an item (probably not a human being) saliva-attracting, and thus salivator-entrancing. By this token the Parrot Saheb in anger is said with narratorial sarcasm to take on not the 'red' but the 'deliciously attractive' appearance of a 'mouthwatering-delectable entrancer sweetmeat'.

Referent 2 again [person]: Negative Dhvani-Suggestion by Etymology 4 (spittle): the angry Parrot as slaving infantile, idiot, monkeylike (?), babbling (?)

Just as lāl as the positive 'dear son' carries negative connotations of 'spoilt child', lāl as 'spittle' has dual child-related associations of affection (mouthwatering delectability in accordance with attractive infant liquid, lisping sounds and 'spit-bubbles'?) and of contempt. The form of lāl as lālu is defined in one place as 'slaving idiot' (Ganguli), just as Hindi lāl, perhaps most often in the form of lal-lu, can mean both the affectionate 'sonny' and a 'booby' (<urdupoint>), thus with some possible influence from ul-lu, (stupid) 'owl', 'fool',¹⁰ 'useless', 'coward'. Bengali

¹⁰ For what it is worth, Persian lāl separately seems also to mean 'inarticulate'. Along with lāla, would lālana/lālanā/lālaka as playfully caressing or as playing with words give Sanskrit lālaka as 'a king's jester', 'jesting or evasive reply', 'secret matter' and lāla (Monier-Williams) and lālam (Apte) as 'persuasion'?

lālu is ‘one who dribbles’, ‘often given by parents as an affection-nickname to infants who dribble’, its rustic form *nālu*, its contemptuous form *lelo*, its high language form ‘*lāl-bihāri*’ (Das, on the compound personal name Lal Bihari/Lalbihari), though there is no particular reason to see *lālu* as exclusively an abbreviation of *this* name rather than an abbreviation of *any* personal name starting with Lal, including Lal Mohan/Lalmohan (see Referent 3 below).

The word *lāl* also appears as *lāl*, *markat*, monkey’ (*‘lāl 2. (figuratively)’* (<<https://accessibledictionary.gov.bd>>); *markat* as ‘macaco’ (i.e. ‘macaque’: <www.bangladict.com>); ‘macaque’ as ‘(abusively), overactive child’ (Bidyanidhi). At least two species of macaque in India can have red/pinkish faces (the rhesus, the stump-tailed, and sometimes the bonnet macaque), so this figurative sense involving red-faced and childish monkey-likeness might apply in the *lālu* nickname as well. An infant (dribbling?) babbles away attractively in one of the four meanings of Sanskrit *lālaka/lālikā*, ‘an infant’s attempts at speaking’ (Monier-Williams). That infant also babbles in Sanskrit *lalalla*, ‘indistinct or lisping utterance’ (Monier-Williams, Macdonell). Though these are not Bengali words, their traces might remain in Bengali ‘dear infant son’ *lāl*. Sanskrit *lālāsrava*/Bengali *lālāsrab* have the same meaning as Bengali ‘*lāl gaṛāna* and *lāl paṛā*, specified as ‘salivation in *infancy, old age, bodily weakness* and greed for food’ (Bidyanidhi, italics mine), that is, an act of weak (infantile) loss of self-control. So, when the angry Parrot Saheb yells out in the next sentence (part of the *same* sentence in the original publication), he takes on the appearance of something that salivates in a weak loss of self-control, a slavering idiot, infantile, redfacedly simian, babbling, again with *-mohan* ‘entrancer’ only as sarcastic doubling contranomer.

Referent 3 [divinity]: Positive *Dhwani*-Suggestion by Etymology 5 (epithet of Krishna): the angry Parrot turns as attractively black as the incarnate divine child/lover Krishna (in anger?) [cf. Referent 2, person]

A 1922 note on a personal name reads ‘Domingo Lalmon — Lalmohan is a favourite Bengal sweetmeat: but is also a common name [here, second personal name?’

surname?]) amongst the lower classes in Eastern Bengal' (Stapleton 26). So while the name might *also* be relatively common among all classes as a personal name across the whole of Bengal, there is no question that compounds can turn *-mohan* into *-man* (*-mon* is the older phonetic transliteration from Bengali). Wherever in Bengal it occurs, Lalmohan/Lal Mohan *might* be linguistically Urdu/Hindi influenced, and redolent of North Indianness. The Hindi dictionary's first definition of 'Lāl-man' is 'SriKrishna', quoting a dialect couplet, and derives the word from *lāl* and *mani*, gem (Dasa). Popular sources on the world wide web define the name Lalmohan/Lal Mohan as 'Lord of [sic] Krishna', 'Indian, Bengali, Hindu' (e.g. <<https://www.babynamesdirect.com/boy/lalmohan>>; <<http://tamilputhumai.com/babynome/Meaning-Of-Lalmohan.html>>), but since not one of the Bengali dictionaries used has 'Lal Mohan' as 'Krishna', more substantiation of Bengali 'Lal Mohan' as 'Krishna' is required.

One source compiled by 'linguistic experts' notes among the meanings of 'Lal' as a name by itself, 'an epithet of the god Krishna', incarnation of Vishnu (Hanks) — that is, a descriptive term which characterises a person, can substitute for their name or title and thus works almost as a name. Krishna's mother addresses him with *lāl/lal-lā* 'dear' words in North India (see Qureshpor et al. for an example), but I cannot ascertain whether this word is common in Bengali Vaishnavite poetry. 'Lal' appears in compound names in Sanskrit (see *lāl* in Monier-Williams), in several North Indian modern languages, and in Bengal it appears in such compound personal names as 'Lal Mohan', 'Mohan Lal'.¹¹

Modern compound personal names can tack together words of Sanskrit origin with others (e.g., the Middle Eastern languages). As the second component of a compound personal name, both *-lāl* and *-mohan* act semantically very much like one of many such suffixes to the first part of such a compound name (though the components are

¹¹ 'Mohan Lal' is a Krishna-epithet, but also that of a distinct Shaivite deity (see <https://hamariweb.com/names/hindu/hindi/boy/mohanlal-meaning_30418>, and <<https://www.babynamemeaningz.com/Mohanlal-meaning-67548>>).

separated in practice in *Roman* script), a compound name which has only a tenuous semantic relation between its components.¹²

In personal compound names it seems that ‘Lal’ *tends* to be redolent of Krishna, who may be both the divine infant beloved of all, and the handsome, entrancing divine lover. Such epithets as ‘Pyaré Lal’

(<https://parenting.firstcry.com/articles/100-unique-baby-boy-names-inspired-by-lord-krishna>), which only means ‘Beloved Beloved’, point to either aspect of Krishna. Some epithets unequivocally denote Krishna, such as ‘Nanda Lal’, ‘Nanda’s-Beloved (Foster-Son)’, much like the sarcastic ‘Nanda Dulal’ above.¹³ Among Krishna’s compound names/epithets as divine lover, many which end in *-bihāri* evoke him as the Dallying One engaging in pleasurable acts as he sojourns and roves in various pleasure-grounds.¹⁴ One of these Krishna-names is ‘Lal Bihari’, ‘Beloved-Sojourner’ (said to be the formal form of the spittle-related Bengali nicknames ‘Lalu’ etc. above, which means the same thing as ‘Bihari Lal’, ‘Dallying Sojourner-and-Beloved’).

Here *-mohan*, so far only *lāl*’s ‘companionate mirror-word’ (of which no *dhwani*, be it female supernatural being, charm, weapon, place-name, plant, attractive thing, or ‘surname’ seems relevant in context) assumes greater significance. Many compounds ending in *-mohan* mean ‘entrancer of’ the person or thing denoted in the first part of the compound. Since ‘Mohan’ appears to be an epithet/name of both Vishnu and Shiva, only *some* of these compounds are unequivocally Krishna’s epithets: e.g. ‘Gopi/Gopika Mohan’, ‘Milkmaids’ Entrancer’,¹⁵ ‘Manmohan’, ‘Mind-Entrancer’ (the name of the poet brother of barrister-politician Lalmohan Ghosh, where both

¹² E.g. *-kumar*, ‘youth’, *-pati*, ‘lord (of)’, *-charan*, ‘(at the) foot (of)’, etc. etc.

¹³ E.g. ‘Kanai Lal’, ‘Krishna-the-Beloved’; ‘Braja Lal’, ‘(of the place) Braja-Beloved’; naming his mother, ‘Devaki Lal’, ‘Devaki’s-Beloved (Son)’; Alluding to Krishna’s exploits is ‘Giridhar Lal’, ‘Mountain-Bearing Beloved’ (Bidyanidhi, with a quotation from Bengali Vaishnavite poetry).

¹⁴ Place-related are ‘Goshta Bihari’, ‘Pasture-Sojourning/Roving-Dallying [One]’; ‘Bana Bihari’, ‘Bipin Bihari’, both ‘Forest/Grove- Sojourning/Roving-Dallying [One]’; ‘Braja Bihari’ ‘[In]Braja- Sojourning/Roving-Dallying [One]’, ‘Golok Bihari’ (‘Heaven-Sojourner’ in ‘Go-loka’, the ‘Cow- Heaven’ redolent of ‘Go-kula’, the pastoral earthly paradise of Krishna, incarnation of Vishnu, hence ‘Krishna/Vishnu’). Act-related is ‘Rash Bihari’ ‘(at the)Rash(festival)-Dallying[One]’. Appearance-related is ‘Bankim Bihari’, ‘Oblique-Glanced [Flirtatious]-Dallying [One]’ or ‘Curved-Postured-Dallying [One]’.

¹⁵ E.g. ‘Vraja/Braja/Brij Mohan’, ‘Of the region of Braja, the Entrancer’; ‘Madan Mohan’, ‘Cupid’s own Entrancer’, and formed a little differently, ‘Murali Mohan’, ‘Flute[-bearing] Entrancer’.

names are Krishna-epithets, since Bengali siblings' names are often similarly patterned). In other such compounds the first element of the compound modifies the second. Two such unequivocally child-related Krishna-epithets are 'Bala Mohan', 'Child who Entrances' (Iyengar) and 'Kishori Mohan', 'Juvenile/Rosebud Entrancing [One]' (no source). 'Krishna Mohan' means 'Krishna-the-Entrancing [One]', but even in other cases which evoke Krishna less immediately, like 'Pyré Mohan', 'Beloved and Entrancing [One]' (<aumamen.com>),¹⁶ the 'Mohan' almost becomes synonymous with 'Krishna'. Despite all this, of course, all names which include 'Lal', 'Bihari' and 'Mohan' do *not* necessarily point to Krishna.¹⁷

Nevertheless, given the Krishna-redolences of both 'Lal' and 'Mohan', it can fairly be concluded that such is the case with the more general-sounding 'Lal Mohan', 'Beloved and Entrancing [One]'. Thus narratorial sarcasm/irony has the angry Parrot Saheb look like the Beloved-Entrancing Divine Child or Lover. But *this* angry Beloved-Entrancing Divine Child or Lover is possibly not red- but as *black*-faced as Krishna. For 'Krishna' means 'dark-coloured'. And this deity's euphemistic epithets/names are 'Shyam' ('Dark'), 'Ghanashyam' ('Cloud-Dark'), and ones which use the direct word for 'black', *kālā/kālo*, including 'Kalo-manik' ('Black Jewel'), 'Kala Chand' ('Black Moon'), 'Kelé Sona' ('Black Gold'), and 'Chikan Kala' ('Glowing Black [One]') (all Biswas). Though it does not appear in lists of Bengali idioms and is not usual, a face in Bengali can indeed blacken or darken with anger as it can in English.¹⁸ With this meaning, childish or lover-like *dark* anger sarcastically contrasts the Parrot's unattractive state and the dark divinity as ever-attractive.

¹⁶ E.g. 'Madhura Mohan', 'Pleasant Entrancer', 'Ananda Mohan', 'Joyful, Entrancing [One]' or 'Joy-and-Attraction'.

¹⁷ 'Lal Chand', 'Dear Moon' and *perhaps* 'Pulin Bihari' 'Sandbank- Sojourning/Roving-Dallying [One]' do not unequivocally point to Krishna. Other compound proper names with *-mohan* as the second component denote another entrancing figure, hence: Ram Mohan', 'Ram-the-Entrancer'), and even 'Phani Mohan', 'Cobra[-who]-Entrances'. Many 'World/Worlds'-Entrancer' compound names/epithets evoke the Divine: 'Avani/Abani-Mohan', 'Jag-Mohan', 'Jagan-Mohan', 'Viswa/Bishwa Mohan', 'Bhuvan/Bhuban Mohan', 'Trailokya Mohan', but not all immediately evoke Krishna. Thus *jagan-mohan* and *viswa/bishwa-mohan* also mean 'one who/that which *perplexes* all beings'; *jag-mohan* can also denote an alcoholic drink.

¹⁸ E.g. in the modern song '*Rage mukh kalo keno, sundori konya?*' 'Why is your face black with rage, beautiful maiden?' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8F_y76fvTbM&ab_channel=SonaliRupali>.

Referent 4 [red parrot]: Positive *Dhwani*-Suggestion by Etymology 6

(red/dear-entrancing bird): the angry green Parrot turns as red as a red parrot¹⁹

The Parrot Saheb is a *tiyé*, an ordinary common green parrot, formally *tiyā* (derived from or cognate with Hindi *tuniyā*: Bandyopadhyay 1; named after the bird's call). The *tiyé* is identified as the talking 'Psittacus Alexandri' (Carey, now *Psittacula alexandri*), red-breasted parakeet. *Lāl-mohan* is a word for a 'particular kind of red bird' as well as 'a sweetmeat' (<english-bangla>), and so it makes perfect generic sense if the green Parrot Sahib's anger is said sarcastically to transform his appearance into that of a red bird, another sort of parrot, and even more sense in context if this other sort of parrot is a 'naturalised alien' one.

Psittacula alexandri, Red-breasted green parakeet, is one of the real-life contenders for the position of the bird more formally called *hīrā-mohan*, a 'kind of paroquet or parrot' (Ganguli), and less formally called *hīrā/hīré/hiré- mān/man* (with varying long and short i and a) (<accessibledictionary.gov bd/>). This parrot is renowned in Indian history, historical legend, high literature and folktale. Since *Bhondar Bahadur* is a modern fantasy fiction with much self-conscious reference to folk materials, it makes even more sense if we accept the green *Tiyé Saheb* as a modern green *Hīrā-mohan/Hīrā-man Saheb* who is angrily 'not himself' as he reddens into a correspondingly named and quite as beautiful red *Lāl-mohan* parrot. The latter, however, seems much less literarily-inflected, although there are such stray items as 'The Story of a Lalman', a Bengali folktale (Jnanendra Shashi Gupta, *Upakathā*, 1913). *Bhondar Bahadur* only uses the word *tiyé*, but it does mention the Parrot Saheb's return to a calm greenness, so the possibility of a covert connection of the his metaphorical metamorphosis from green to red parrot still holds. Alas, identifying *tiyé*, *hīrā-mohan /hīrā-man* and *lāl-mohan/lāl-man* to translate them predictably takes us into a maze of Sanskrit, modern Indian vernacular and scientific names, etymologies and species.

¹⁹ I am particularly indebted to Honorary Professor Dr Penny Olsen AM, Research School of Biology, Australian National University, for the taxonomic materials in this section.

The green *hīrā-man*, *Psittacula alexandri*, is found in Indic history as one of the three similar North Indian talking ring-necked parrot species which Alexander the Great took back to Greece. In literature, the *hīrā-man* appears in such North Indian higher literary genres as the Sufi *premakhyān* love-allegory (14th cent. ff.), the semi-historical ornate, polished *kāvya-s Prithviraj Raso* (c. 16th cent ff.) and *Padmavati* (1540: see Dasa; here as *hīrā-mani*, also as such in Alaol’s 1648 Bengali translation/adaptation), and in generically lower North Indian (folk) ‘tales’ (Dasa). In Bengali, the word *hīrā-man* is specified as ‘n. (folk-tales). ...a traditional name of a talking popinjay’ (Biswas). The parrot ‘Rájá, who was called Híráman parrot’ appears in ‘How the Rájá’s Son won the Princess Labám’ in Maive Stokes’s *Indian Fairy Tales* (1879, 1880), said (perhaps incorrectly) to be the second such Indic collection, ‘The Story of a Hiranman’ (1878) appears in Lal Behari Day’s *Folk-Tales of Bengal* (1883), the earliest major Bengal one, and a child talks of a pet caged singing bird ‘named Hīrā-man’ in couplet No. 47 of Abdul Karim’s ‘*Chattagrāmi Chhele-Bhulāna Chharā [I]*’ (‘Chittagong’s Child-Distracting Rhymes [1]’) in *Sahitya-Parishat-Patrika (Literary Academy Journal)*, 9:2, 1309 B.S. (1909, at <https://ia601604.us.archive.org/12/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.339238/2015.339238.1309-_text.pdf>). Folk etymology might have turned the *-man* ending into *-mohan* rather than vice versa.

‘The *-man* ending is likely to be a Sanskrit ‘strengthened middle participial ending’, ‘one who is characterised as/by x’, which can ‘act as an adjective’ (White). The *hīrā* probably derives from vowel transposition and modification of Sanskrit ‘*harit*, green’ (Carey, unabridged ed. , cited Day 1878, 295; [1883] 1889, 209; etymology not in abridged ed.; also ‘emerald’, ‘frog’ etc.: Monier-Williams) — and from *hari* (Bidyanidhi), ‘green, greenish’ (and ‘parrot’, ‘frog’ etc.: Monier-Williams, Apte). The Vedic colour palette was limited, and Sanskrit *harit/harita* is ‘greenish’ and *also* ‘ochre’ and ‘tawny’ (Monier-Williams) So in *literature*, the *hīrā-man* figures as an ‘imaginary’ and sometimes (usually?)

‘golden’ sentient talking bird.²⁰ Sanskrit *hīraka*, Hindi and Bengali *hīrā*, also means ‘diamond’, which fits another suggested derivation for *-mohan/-man* in context as ‘jewel’.²¹

Through the nineteenth century, the real-life green *hīrā-man/hīrā-mohan* and the red *lāl-man/lāl-mohan* were identified as separate *non*-Indian species, but ones found in India with Indian names, since for centuries, parrots were highly valued, carried on trade routes, and brought from overseas by the EIC and other sea captains as presents to curry favour. First in 1825 comes the *hīrāman* as a ‘beautiful species of parrot, a native of the Molucca islands, (*Psittacus sinensis*)’ (Carey, no *lāl-man*). Then, in c. 1858 come ‘908. Hira-Mohan (‘Prized favourite’), Hind. ...’ ‘Genus *Mascarinus*’, referring to two specimens from the Moluccas, and ‘907. Lal-Mohan (i.e. ‘Red favourite’), Hind. ...’, ‘Genus *Eclectus*’ referring to a drawing from the Moluccas (Horsfield; both genera in subfamily ‘*Loriina*’). *Psittacus sinensis* and *Eclectus pectoralis* are earlier species names for *Eclectus roratus*, the Grand Eclectus Parrot of the Moluccas. The red and green Eclectus are *now* known to be the female and male of the same genus, species and subspecies *Eclectus roratus roratus*. Finally, this mistake is corrected in 1913, when the male and female Eclectus appear together and *hīrā-man* is ‘A particular foreign parrot species (*eclectus pectoralis* [now *Eclectus roratus*]). The male green, red marks on the sides, tail small. Female red’ (Bidyanidhi).

But yet another foreign contender for the *lāl-man* emerges, also made known by trade in India. In Hindi the *lāl-man* is said to be a ‘parrot whose whole body is red, wings green, beak pink, and rump black’ (Dasa; directly translated at <<https://educalingo.com/en/dic-hi/lalamana>>). This seems to accord most closely with the three species of Australasian King Parrot (although their rumps are blue and

²⁰ One suggested — probably fanciful/incorrect — derivation of *hīrā-man* is from *hīranmay*, golden (Dasa); another is from *madan*, Kamadeva, god of love (Bidyanidhi).

²¹ This is *-mohan/-man* from *mani*, jewel, also probably fanciful: for *hīrā-man* (Day, 1878, 295; [1883], 1889, 209, citing ‘Carey’s *Dictionary*’, unabridged) and for both birds (Dasa).

beaks orange). The Eclectus Parrot above and the King Parrot here are totally different non-Indian species whose ranges do not seem to overlap.

But again, the *lāl-mohan* could also be one of the two or more *native* Indian parrot species whose males have a red/reddish *head/face*. The less likely contender, from Eastern Bangladesh, Northeast India and further eastwards, is the smaller male pink-faced Blossom-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula roseata*). Its territorial range does not overlap with that of the more likely species contender for the Indian *lāl-mohan*, the related larger male yellow-beaked Plum-headed Parrot/Parrakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*). This species ranges from northeastern Pakistan to Bangladesh and southwards to Sri Lanka, and its purple-red head/face could be imaginatively regarded as a manifestation of anger. A YouTube clip specifically calls a yellow-beaked Plum-head Parrot ‘My new lalmohan tota’. But a comment on the clip acknowledges this bird as a Plum-head Parrot, but says a *lāl-mohan* parrot does not have a yellow beak and is larger[>]²² So some Indians might instead call a third similar red/pink-faced parrot species/subspecies *lāl-mohan*.

Finally — phew! — *lāl-mohan/-mān/-man*, might denote the tiny sparrow-sized weaverbird often kept as a pet, the similar-sounding *lāl-muniyā* (Indian ‘red munia’, ‘strawberry finch’, and ‘red avadavat’). Given the related Hindi *tuniyā* and Bengali *tiyé*, in the Hindi and Bengali *lāl-muniyā*, *-mun* might be a semi-homonym for *-man* and *-iyā* is simply a (Hindi) diminutive ending. This *lāl-muniyā* is from an entirely different family, the Estrildidae, genus *Amandava*, species *Amandava amandava*. The male always has a red rump and seasonally red bill and upper body. A ‘weaverbird/finch’ *lāl-mohan* as *lāl-muniyā* cannot be rejected too hastily, for it fits the Parrot Sahib *shrinking* into a figurative littleness.

If one rejects the easy escape route of transliteration-sans-translation, how would one translate the green Tiyé Saheb as unmentioned *hīrā-mohan* parrot turning as

²² See <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=54Hnt5oSQgU?>>.

angrily red as a *lāl-mohan* parrot or weaverbird? Since *-mohan*, ‘favourite’ (Horsfield), is in *lāl-mohan*, ‘entrancer’ would remain. Given *hīrā* can mean ‘diamond’, if the Parrot Saheb is a bright green sharp-beaked/tongued? *diamond* parrot, should the *lāl-mohan* into which he specifically changes be ‘red parrot’ or ‘ruby parrot’ to emphasise diamond-to-ruby-and-back-again gemhood? At any rate, any naturalised alien *hīrā-man* parrot accords with the Parrot Saheb’s own outsiderhood. And to this outsiderhood we now turn, with another *dhwani* of *lāl*.

No firm referent, but Negative *Dhwani*-Suggestion of Lal or Lala: the Angrily Red-Repulsive Parrot in Authority as powerful/rich arrogant Ethnic-Outsider [person]?

Quite separately from this passage, the ‘Lal’ in the name ‘Lalmohan/Lal Mohan’ might have a covert *dhwani*-bearing on the Parrot Saheb’s nature and his community, and work with — rather than underpin — a sense of the Parrot Saheb as non-mainstream Outsider. Many (non-Muslim) Bengalis, from East or West Bengal, bear the personal names ‘Lal Mohan/Lalmohan’ and ‘Mohan Lal/Mohanlal’, both indicating ‘Beloved-and-Entrancing (child?) Krishna’. (‘Lalmohan’ is also the name of a place in Bangladesh famous for sweetmeats.) *Lāl* ‘when joined with a name: [means] dear, beautiful’ (<english-bangla>), or ‘beautiful and ‘dear’ as ‘part of Bengali names’ (Bidyanidhi, *lāl* 2; see also Bandopadhyay, suffix examples only in both). We also find *lāl* 1 as ‘ruby’, ‘dear’ and ‘spittle’ in a list of 12 compound personal names, of which only two have *lāl* as the first component (‘Lal Mohan’ and ‘Lal Chand’, ‘Dear/Red Moon’), four are names of Krishna-epithets, one is a Ram-epithet, and the rest are gem-compounds (Bandopadhyay). ‘Lal’ is used by both Hindus and Muslims in the North (see ‘Qureshpor’ et al.), and in Bengal it can similarly take ‘Hindu’ or ‘Muslim’ suffixes as required (as can the related personal name ‘Lālan 2. A particular given name ...’ as ‘dear’ <accessibledictionary.gov.bd>).

Modern Indic ‘surnames’ may derive from the second component of a compound personal name which becomes independent, from a caste or occupation denotation, from a patronymic, from words/endings denoting origins in a particular place, etc.

‘Lal’ is also found as caste/occupation ‘surname’, usually North Indian. As a caste ‘surname’ *lāla* denotes members of a caste which is the result of three generations of mixture (see Monier-Williams) involving the rich Vaishya merchant caste in the first generation on both paternal and maternal sides. A similar caste-‘surname’ is Lala, found in two North Indian castes, the Kayastha scribe caste (‘from Bihar’: Bidyanidhi, *lāl* 2) and the Baniya/Vaishya trader caste. The Persian and then Turkish occupation-title/name Lala, tutor-adviser to a prince-in-training as provincial governor, and later his pupil’s vizier, might overlap with the Kayastha learned/administrative caste occupation. The Bengali term *lālā-ji* means ‘dear sir’ (Bidyanidhi, *lāl* 2), there are many pan-Indian jokes about the grasping miserliness of the/a ‘Lala-ji’, ‘Lala the honourable’ (where the honorific *-ji* of uncertain etymology is also Urdu/Hindi). The Bengali ‘to become *lāl*’ (Biswas) literally ‘to flush/blush’ is metaphorically ‘to become rich’, probably from the wealth of a Lala. Bengali *lālā* is ‘a particular Hindu surname’ and means ‘well-born or rich person’ (<english-bangla>), and the family names of both Lals and Lalas might be redolent of their power and riches.

Given the above, despite Lalmohan/Lal Mohan as a mainstream Bengali personal name, I would suggest (sans validating citation) that the North Indian Hindi/Urdu redolences of ‘ruby’, ‘dear’, ‘spittle’, and (child?), Krishna’s epithet Lal-mohan, Lal as part of a personal name and as caste/occupation ‘surname’ all take us in the direction of non-(mainstream) Bengali Authoritarian Outsiderhood.²³ (The *mohan* in context would be clearly sarcastic, ‘attractive’ meaning ‘unattractive’.) By the stereotypes of mainstream culture all of this accords perfectly with the unnamed Parrot-Saheb as angry, bullying, arrogant, gun-toting, with colonial jack-in-office ‘little Hitler’ pretensions to power in government service — which wither when Bhondar as real Bengali royalty puts him in his place. The Parrot Saheb is also

²³ Compound personal names with *lāl*, ‘ruby’ and ‘dear’, can be ambiguous. Is ‘Moti Lal’ ‘Pearl Ruby’ or ‘Pearl-Beloved’, ‘Hira Lal’ ‘Diamond Ruby’, or ‘Diamond-Beloved’? In the folktale brothers’ names ‘Lal Kamal’ and ‘Nil Kamal’, the *second* element, ‘lotus’ is probably headword, so ‘Red Lotus’ and ‘Blue Lotus’ rather than ‘Ruby Lotus’ and ‘Blue-sapphire[beryl, lapis] Lotus’? I would suggest a North Indian redolence even with the names of the grandsons of the author of *BB*, Mohanlal and Shobhanlal Gangopadhyay, where ‘Shobhanlal’ does not seem to be listed as a Krishna-epithet.

specifically *not* mainstream Bengali *Hindu*, since he says that cremation is not the custom of ‘their religion’.

Just as we are not told the personal name of the I-narrator, and only the species-names for Bhondar and his wife (on the lines of Märchen narrative convention), we only know the Parrot Saheb’s species and his occupation, not his name, which would have cleared up his community. The choices for the Parrot’s community appear to be ‘foreign/Westernised’ (a) North Indian Muslim (b) Bengali Muslim (c) Anglo-Indian (Eurasian) or (d) Bengali Christian. *Stereotypically*, all speak non-standard Bengali, and the last three are sometimes regarded as ‘internal aliens’. With which does the social *dhwani* of *lāl* best fit? Since the (specious?) social *dhwani*-suggestions of *lāl* take us from simple translation (too far?) into interpretation, my translation did not include them, but they are relevant here.

Let us consider the Parrot Saheb's ‘foreignness/Westernisation’. A colloquial Bengali word for ‘Englishman’ was *lāl*, ‘red [complexioned? One]’ [*lāl* 2. (figuratively)’: <accessibledictionary.gov.bd>]. When the Parrot Saheb in anger ‘assumes the appearance of *lāl-mohan*’, he ‘*becomes lāl*’ in redness and is *already* ‘*lāl*’ in culturally non-mainstream Otherness, with both the power of a Lal in administration and that of a ‘Saheb’, from the Arabic via Urdu/Hindi, ‘master’ or ‘white foreigner’. The Bengali phrase ‘*lāl saheb*’, ‘from the Turkish’, means ‘dear gentleman’ (dear sir?) (Bidyanidhi, *lāl* 2). Like *-ji*, *-saheb* in Bengali unmistakably carries a sense of other than the mainstream Bengali Hindu. ‘Saheb’ can be used for any foreigner, anyone in authority, and for whites, Westernised Indians, Anglo-Indians (Eurasians) and Indian Christians. In *Bhondar Bahadur* it is used for Chinese workmen, a (North Indian?) commander-in-chief, and the Parrot Saheb.

But the Parrot Saheb’s fluency in Bengali means he is not English (unless the Chinese workmen’s Hindi is rendered in Hindi, and the Parrot’s Saheb’s language is translated into Bengali). Let us now consider the possibilities of the Parrot Saheb as a Muslim, either North Indian or Bengali. The Parrot Saheb uses an Urdu-derived — thus

‘Muslim’/North Indian/‘Muslim Bengali’ — word for ‘again’; he salaams in Muslim deference; and if he is green, that is a ‘Muslim’ colour. Finally let us consider Christians in India. The Parrot Saheb is a stationmaster, and the colonial railways were populated with Anglo-Indians and some Indian Christians as officials and workers at various levels. Thus, the *lāl* of the *lāl-mohan* metaphor might covertly work with a sense of the Parrot Saheb as either Bengali Muslim or a Bengali Christian with a caste-like occupation in the railways.

Translating the polysemy of the *lāl-mohan* metaphor in *Bhondar Bahadur*

Once more, the *lāl-mohan* sentence in *Bhondar Bahadur* reads merely ‘The Parrot-Saheb, growing frightfully angry, assumed the appearance/form of *lālmohan*’ leaving ‘understood’ the relevant colour ‘red’ and the word for the ‘plain meaning/referent’, ‘sweetmeat’ (which appeared with *moti-chur*). A calquing translation of *lāl-mohan* (optionally hyphenated) would be ‘of a/the “red entrancer/entrancing” being or object’.

Unless I have unconvincingly concocted all these sets of secondary parallel meanings and *dhwani* in the translator’s equivalent of counting Lady Macbeth’s children, then regardless of deliberate authorial *slesha*-play, the connotations of polysemous *lāl-mohan* go beyond a *clear* metaphor for reddening/darkening in anger. The playful sarcastic/ironic reverberations of *lāl-mohan* would also go largely unnoticed by *both* the pan-Indian and the foreign Anglophone reader. The choices that a translator needs to make are complicated, and the translator needs flexibility to stay as close as possible to the meanings of expressions in their original linguistic/cultural context, so as to convey something of what the source text does not directly say but which is ‘understood’ in part or whole by the readers of the original. Even more constraining than the jujū of ‘consistency’ of practice is the fetish of narrowly interpreted ‘fidelity to the letter of the source’. Hence, apart from the clear redness, how much unstated polysemous *dhwani* sarcasm was my otherwise largely literal translation to include or gesture at for the sake of ‘fidelity’ to what seemed to me to be the spirit of the text (risking aesthetic distortion of that text in a translator’s ‘overbidding’ or

‘over-egging’), and how? Unmarked multiple additional phrases (rather than the one or two elsewhere) spread through the sentence for readability seemed the best way, along with transliteration, a hyphen, quotation marks to signal literal translation, and spelling out the (clear or only potential?) sarcasm here.

Hence my: ‘The Parrot-Saheb grew frightfully angry, and a dear, charming sight he made as he flushed with rage, and went as dark red as the “blushing-beloved, fascinating” *lal-mohan* sweetmeat.’ And ‘assumed the appearance/form, of’ becomes ‘sight’; ‘angry’ gets an additional ‘rage’; red anger is underlined in ‘flushed’, ‘dark red’ and ‘blushing’; *lāl*-dearness is the repeated ‘dear’ and beloved’; and *-mohan* and *lāl-mohan* are treated similarly and rendered ‘charming’ and ‘fascinating’.

This rendering names the colour, adds the understood ‘sweetmeat’, and on the principle of ‘translation before transliteration except with proper names’ provides my usual translation of sweetmeat names in longish phrases placed in inverted commas the first time to signal the poetic metaphors often involved. There seemed to be no one-to-one or shorter equivalents in English. Could these longish phrases — “‘pearl/pearlbead-powder” dainties’, “‘blushing-beloved, fascinating” sweetmeat’ — not be relished as one does a bulky club sandwich, rather than spat out as tasteless or bad-tasting hard-to-swallow mouthfuls?

As I said, including the transliterated ‘*lal-mohan*’ in the main text, *against* the general rule for treating sweetmeats, was intended to provide semantic immediacy for non-Bengali pan-Indian Anglophone readers, who might not know the sweetmeat but would very probably recognise the personal name, Krishna’s epithet. Rendering it ‘Lal Mohan’ would have entailed a footnote for a minor matter. Thus ‘*lal-mohan*’ here received ‘more important translation, then less important transliteration’, hyphenation to signify nominal compound, and italics to signify loan-word status. The order of importance was the opposite with the phrase for the semi-personified Magic Staff in *Bhondar Bahadur*, which had received ‘transliteration sans italics but

with initial capital letters, then translation' because it is used as a semantic equivalent of a 'personal name'.

Marvell condemned overbold translators who are 'Authors grown,/For ill Translators make the Book their own' with 'He is Translation's thief that addeth more,/As much as he that taketh from the Store/Of the first Author' ('To his worthy Friend Doctor Witty', 1651). But said Johnson on Pope's translation: 'but to have added can be no great crime, if nothing be taken away' (*Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*, 1781). To 'It is a very pretty tale, Dr Sircar, but you must not call it Gaganendranath', I reply, 'I don't; I call it translation of his tale, attempting textual fidelity to overt meanings and covert connotations.' I now regret fearing readerly bewilderment and lacking sufficient ingenuity somehow to introduce 'rubicund', 'ruby-valuable', 'mouth-watering', 'child', 'dribbling/drivelling infantile idiot', the red parrot and Krishna's 'stormcloud-black' complexion as an angry 'black look' or 'darkened face', even if these verge on extraneous literary-critical interpretation, I analysed the Parrot's outsiderhood in my exegesis without the *dhwanis* of *lāl*. Had I adapted the recent practice of the Clay Sanskrit Library²⁴ for *slesha*-punning (which include a *non-italic* slanted font and triple colon to separate alternatives) to *dhwani*-connotations, the Teutonic results would have been

The Parrot-Saheb, having grown frightfully angry, assumed the appearance/form of a "rubicund-red entrancer [sweetmeat] :: ruby-valuable entrancer [sweetmeat] :: dear entrancer [sweetmeat] :: infant-son [(sarc.) spoilt-child]-entrancer [sweetmeat] :: mouthwateringly-delectable entrancer [sweetmeat] :: [(sarc.) infantile drivelling idiot] :: red-parrot :: [(sarc.)divinely seductive child/lover, glowering dark-cloud complexioned, entrancing]

²⁴ For example as in Budhasvamin's *The Emperor of the Sorcerers Vol. 2*, trans. by James Mallinson, [New York:] New York U.P./JJC Foundation, 2005. 11 (Note on 'Wordplay'). Clever *slesha* interpretation could render our sweetmeat as one 'mouth-wateringly [i.e. greed-inducing]-entrancing-to a-darling-child' or even 'like-a-darling-child'. Or on the model of such similar compound proper names as Mohini Mohan, '[Female] Entrancer's [Male] Entrancer', or Madan Mohan, 'Cupid's [Male] Entrancer' (Krishna), Lal Mohan could be wrenched into meaning '[Male] Beloved's [Male] Entrancer', and been linked to a claim for exclusively male-centred homoerotic nature of the narrative. The word *lāl-mohan* as a homonym for both parrot and sweetmeat could be the grounds for further play with sweetmeats, parrots and children with first, another link between 'parrot' and 'dear child' through another name for/variation of the *pāntuā/lāl-mohan* sweetmeat/s is the *totā-puli*, the 'parrot-roll', where Urdu/Hindi/Bengali *totā*, 'A parrot; — pet, darling (a term of endearment applied to children)' (Platts) might again refer to a red/red-faced parrot species; and second, with play with Urdu/Hindi *mithu*, Bengali *mithu* (a common nickname) as 'sweet' (cf. *methai*, 'sweetmeat', from Hindi/Urdu) and as 'A term of endearment for parrots and children; a parrot' (Platts).

Krishna” [a compound common noun which is also a personal name, the Urdu/Hindi resonances of the first part of which arguably carry a non-mainstream-Bengali feel].

These ugly and bewildering results would have needed a footnote/appendix at the length of the present note.

I see translation as a craft, not an art; the source text as body, its translation as shadow; the author as superior to the translator; the original not to be ‘improved’ on by the translator playing at aesthetician or literary critic. I seek no degree of authorship for myself. Mine does not aim to be the sort of translation which seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France called *belles infidèles*, beautiful but unfaithful, in effect different new texts. In turning a ‘dark word’ relatively clear, a mild degree of infidelity to the letter at one point seemed the only viable option.

In aiming for ‘approximate equivalence and inevitable inadequacy’ in a translation, in selecting from among the rich choices held out by dictionary information which might be incomplete, etymologies which might be wrong, in risking incorrect conclusions and aesthetically unfortunate, stilted results, a translation cannot but turn an original into something else, an inevitable transformation of textual being even more clearly the case when the results add notes, background information, and analysis. As I see it, the matters with which I started this note boil down to two basic questions. First, ‘In translating a work from one language, culture and period to another, attempting to remain simultaneously faithful to textual ‘plain meaning’ and to include some of what the culture/language leave unstated, *how much* leeway is allowed, particularly with culturally specific items alien to new and plural target audiences?’ Second, ‘*How much* scholarship must a volume display to warrant a modicum of readerly trust that the translator has done their homework and pondered their decisions?’

Sanjay Sircar

I am indebted to folklorist Gareth Whitaker for his meticulous scrutiny of this text

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