



A NEWSLETTER FROM JENNY BHATT
WRITER. LITERARY TRANSLATOR. BOOK CRITIC.
WRITING INSTRUCTOR. DESI BOOKS FOUNDER.

WE ARE ALL TRANSLATORS

FOCUSING ON THE ART & CRAFT OF LITERARY
TRANSLATION & THE TRANSLATING LIFE.

NOTE: Some email service providers clip these newsletters so please click on the "message clipped" link, if you see it, to read further. Thank you.

Dear Reader,

The Booker International Prize was announced yesterday. For the first time in their thirteen year tenure, they awarded a novel translated from a South Asian language: ***Tomb of Sand*** (original title: Ret Samadhi) written by Geetanjali Shree and translated by Daisy Rockwell. Truly well-deserved for these two ladies with their long career and many works.

What took the Booker International so long? The literary translation landscape has been flourishing in India for decades. Some might even say: centuries. I have a few theories and it might not be possible to cover all of these in this newsletter. I may have to write a longer piece. But, first, let's witness this powerful, historic moment for what it is and enjoy it. You can listen to the author and translator reading an excerpt at [Desi Books](#), where it was my pleasure to host them last year. You can watch the entire awards ceremony [here](#). And you can read a post-win chat with the author and translator at [The Guardian](#) (by John Self.)

And the Booker
International goes to . . .

DESIBOOKS
SOUTH ASIAN LITERATURE
Host: Jenny Bhatt
<https://desibooks.co>

#DesiReads with
GEETANJALI SHREE &
DAISY ROCKWELL
Ep 54: NOV 03, 2021

TRANSLATED BY
TOMB OF SAND
GEETANJALI SHREE
DAISY ROCKWELL

WE ARE ALL TRANSLATORS

© JENNY BHATT.
<HTTPS://CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/BY-ND/4.0/>

Another excellent thing with this win is that the UK publisher, Tilted Axis Press, was founded by Deborah Smith with her prize money when she herself won the 2016 Man Booker International. So it's a terrific way for this to come full circle for Deborah, who is a role model in many ways.

All that said, I'm conflicted about literary awards in general. Of course, they do a world of good for the authors/translators who get longlisted, or shortlisted, or win. I'm all for that. They are, however, also subject to a whole lot of biases and privileges. For example, the Booker International has particular [eligibility](#)

[requirements](#) for publication, distribution, and marketing, which are not feasible for many publishers. So it is never a level playing field. That said, sometimes, an award brings visibility to more than the winning author/translator. As in this case, where a South Asian language has been represented for the very first time. And we hope this means that it will bring more attention to South Asian literature overall.

Within India, there are other more complex cultural dynamics at play too. For example, we have what's called the translation pyramid, where literature from certain languages gets translated more (and hence is more accessible, visible, and dominant): Bangla, Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, to name a few. Probe further and you'll find that's because there are more bilingual/multilingual translators and readers in those languages than others, which makes them more "marketable" to publishers. Dig even deeper for why those languages have more translators and readers and you'll unearth regional complexities related to the education, class, even caste systems, dating back to colonial times at least. There are underlying misconceptions as to which languages are considered "pure" versus "corrupt" or "derivative." There are opinions about which languages have rich written literary traditions (when so many South Asian languages still have oral traditions that need to be captured before they're lost forever.) Never mind translations into English, these cultural politics exist even for translations into designated filter languages.

I want to end on a positive note by sharing two things. First, in 2020, I was approached by the *Global Literature in Libraries Initiative* to be a guest editor for an entire month to spotlight South Asian literature in translation. You can read the entire [series with some 25 South Asian translators here](#). Karen Van Drie, who runs GLLI, had seen me complain on Twitter often about listicles that often left out South Asian literature entirely. Another time, when I made a similar complaint, I was invited to publish my own list, which I did in 2021 at [World Literature Today](#). Trust me, though, for every ten complaints I make, I get maybe one such invitation to help address the issue. :) And I'm always grateful when that happens.

Of course, these days, I'm taking a social media break. So no such complaints for a while. But, if you'd like to share any of this on social media, I will be most thankful.

Until next week.

Warmly,

[Jenny Bhatt](#)

NOTE: All the books mentioned or featured in this newsletter are listed at the Bookshop below. I earn a tiny affiliate fee if you buy a book from the list. It goes towards funding this otherwise free newsletter. Thank you.

JENNY'S BOOKSHOP (US)

Some interesting links

[ATTEND: Negotiating Literary Translation Contracts by The Authors Guild \(Jun](#)

2, 2022 01:00 PM Eastern).

APPLY: English PEN is looking for assessors for their PEN Translates grant programme

APPLY: Literary Translation Summer School by Bristol University (4-8 July 2022; online).

READ: The Ecstatic Excess of Translation: The Millions Interviews Soje by Jaeyeon Yoo

LISTEN: Jhumpa Lahiri on how she fell in love with translating and how it shapes her writing by Mary-Louise Kelly (NPR).

Connect with me at the links below.



If you find this newsletter useful, please share it on.



New reader? [Click to subscribe](#)

All newsletter content is the copyright © of Jenny Bhatt. It is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](#). Please ensure proper linkage and attribution (e.g. Bhatt, Jenny. "We Are All Translators," March 25, 2022) and do not transform, adapt, or remix. Thank you. If you have questions, please contact [here](#).

[Personal website](#) for my latest books, publications, news, events, workshops, and more. [Desi Books](#) for the latest news and views about South Asian literature from the world over.

jenny@jennybhattwriter.com

You received this email because you signed up.

[If this is no longer useful to you, click here to unsubscribe.](#)

