

**“One God equally alive under any name”:
Wanda Dynowska (Umadevi) and spirituality in translation
between India and Poland**

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Abstract

The paper discusses the translation work of Wanda Dynowska (Umadevi), a Polish translator, editor, publisher, journalist, poet, and educator, who devoted herself to bringing together the Polish and Indian cultures. A biographical sketch and an overview of the place of religious/spiritual writing in Dynowska's output are followed by an analysis of her translation of Raihana Tyabji's contemporary narrative of bhakti devotionalism: *The Heart of a Gopi* (1936). Drawing on the approach of 'humanized' translation history and translator studies, based on paratextual material and archival documents, Dynowska's choice of this unusual piece of writing by a nominally Muslim female author is linked to similarities in the author's and the translator's biography and personality: un-orthodox religiousness, views on the role of women, and social position as educated female associates of Gandhi's. Dynowska's foreignizing translation, seemingly at odds with her self-proclaimed aim of popularizing knowledge about India among Poles, is also contextualized in light of her personal beliefs and circumstances: her idea of and relationship with Indian culture, and her independence, as a self-publishing translator, from editors, publishers or critics, who could otherwise influence her strategy.

Keywords

Wanda Dynowska, Raihana Tyabji, bhakti devotionalism, religious translation, translator history

1. Introduction

Wanda Dynowska (1888-1971), also known under her Indian name Umadevi, was a Polish translator, editor, publisher, journalist, poet, educator, and activist. Having settled in India in the mid 1930s, she devoted herself to bringing together Poles and Indians, two nations which she believed to share special affinity. The life and work of this “multidiscursive mediator” (Pym, 2009, p. 33) seem to merge into one deeply personal project or, indeed, “mission” (Dębicka-Borek & Ziemann, 2021), with interconnections between particular forms of occupation (social activism, journalism, poetry, translation, publishing, etc.), as well as between the genres she worked on as an author, translator, editor, or publisher (ancient and modern poetry, fiction, political writing, and philosophical, spiritual or religious texts). In what follows, we focus on Dynowska’s work in the area of religious translation, here understood very broadly as the translation of any text “perceived as sacred or holy or used for any purpose considered sacred by a faith community”, “either within organized religions or at the margins of, including beyond the control of institutionalized religions” (Israel, 2019, p. 323).

An example of an unorthodox, indeed controversial text that stretches even this broad definition is a booklet of bhakti devotionism written by a nominally Muslim female author: Raihana Tyabji’s *The Heart of a Gopi* (1941). This unusual narrative and its Polish translation by Dynowska are discussed in the final part of the present paper, following a general overview of more canonical spiritual and religious writing in the translator’s output. First, however, we present a biographical sketch, focusing on Dynowska’s personal experiences and beliefs that shed light on her approach to Indian culture in general, religious writing from India in particular and, ultimately, her treatment of Tyabji’s text. In so doing, we follow Anthony Pym’s call for a “humanized” translation history (2009; see also Chesterman, 2009), which seeks to trace the mobility (life and professional trajectories), multidiscursivity (activities other than translating), and individuality of particular intercultural mediators (their beliefs, tastes, motivations, allegiances). This allows for nuancing traditional methodological dichotomies (Pym, 2009, pp. 30-31), avoiding anachronous generalizations (for example those concerning national culture, nation, and state; cf. p. 26), looking into “decision-making as an ethical activity”, and raising “wider questions about subjectivity and communication” (p. 45). Based on paratextual material and archival documents, we reconstruct the (micro)history of Wanda Dynowska and her work (Munday, 2014) to present this extraordinary figure to the international community of translation scholars¹ and to demonstrate how the historical context (political history of Poland and India) and personal circumstances (Dynowska’s upbringing and background in theosophy) help understand the translator’s decisions, both on the macro-level (choice of author/text) and micro-level (particular translation solutions).

2. Wanda Dynowska’s background: theosophy, empowerment, translation

Wanda Dynowska was born in 1888 in Petersburg, Russian Empire, to a well-off Polish family. She grew up on her mother’s estate on Lake Istal in Polish Livonia (present-day Latvia), a historically Polish territory under Russian rule. While her parents’ unhappy marriage was nothing unusual in itself, the fact that Helena Dynowska (née Sokołowska) separated from her husband, lawyer Eustachy Dynowski, and took full charge of bringing up the young Wanda (Trzcińska, 2015, p. 166), was a solution untypical for the time. Helena was a strong mother figure, instrumental in the development of Wanda’s unorthodox, eclectic and synthesising approach to spirituality, her patriotism, and her awareness of women’s potential as active members of the society. A pious Roman Catholic and church benefactress, at the same time

¹ Apart from Dębicka-Borek & Ziemann (2021), there are only two English-language publications devoted exclusively to Dynowska (Tokarski, 1994; Dębicka-Borek, 2018), neither of which focuses on translation.

she was believed to be a clairvoyante and a mystic, communing with angels, elves, and spirits (Trzcińska, 2015, p. 166). Flesh-and-blood visitors to her home included notable Polish artists and intellectuals, who came from Warsaw, Vilnius, and other cities to seek inspiration in the peaceful Livonian province. For Wanda, living in this “haunted house” (Tokarski, 1994, p. 89) combined with a literary salon was a formative experience. Growing up, she believed in the presence of the supernatural in the world around her, and had a strong affection for nature and the countryside. On the other hand, she received high-class private education, developing a passion for literature, philosophy, and languages; apart from her native Polish and fluent Russian, she also knew French, Italian, English and Spanish, and possibly Latvian (Tokarski, 1994, p. 90). She read the *Bhagavad Gita*² (in Russian translation), alongside the Bible and the Quran (Trzcińska, 2015, p. 170).

Wanda’s open-mindedness and intellectual curiosity were combined with strong patriotic feelings and the belief that the true locus of the Polish ‘national spirit’ is culture and religion. At the time of her birth, Poland had not existed on the political map of Europe for almost a century – since the third partition of its territory between Russia, Prussia and Austria in 1795 (Davies, 1982, pp. 511-546). Polish Livonia had been under Russian dominance even longer, since 1772. In this historical context, the survival of the stateless nation depended on its ability to cultivate tradition. Adhering to Roman Catholicism was an identity statement in itself, given the privileged position of the Eastern Orthodox Church in the Russian Empire. A major influence on Wanda – with respect to both her literary style and her views – was the work of Polish Romantic poets, persecuted by the tsarist regime for supporting the Polish fight for independence in the first half of the 19th century.

Anti-Russian sentiments may be one reason why, from hindsight, Dynowska emphasized that her interest in esotericism, developed in late teens, stemmed not from personal contacts but from memories of previous incarnations and from her own reading (Tokarski, 1994, pp. 90-91). Notably, the book she cited as her first major esoteric inspiration was J.C. Chatterjee’s *La Philosophie ésotérique de l’Inde* (1899; Polish translation 1911). Dynowska downplayed influences from the Warsaw Theosophical Society (subordinated to Russian authorities in the former Polish capital city), even though one of her private tutors was a member of this organization: the Polish Neoromantic author Tadeusz Miciński, fascinated by India. Similarly, even though in her twenties Dynowska travelled to Moscow and met some prominent representatives of the theosophical movement, she acknowledged Western-European theosophists instead.

Esotericism, occultism, and theosophy gained popularity in the 19th century as a response to the over-rationalisation of positivism and empirio-criticism. From the very beginning, these spiritual movements attracted many women and were connected with the fight for women’s rights, to the extent that we can speak of a “proto-feminist turn” in late 19th-century esotericism (Hess & Dulcka, 2017, pp. 53-54; see also Faxneld, 2017). The Theosophical Society was co-founded by the Russian occultist Helena Blavatsky in New York in 1875, and in Dynowska’s time it was headed by the British social activist and feminist Annie Besant. Combining Western esotericism (especially Qabalah) with ancient European Neoplatonism as well as Asian religions (especially Vedanta Hinduism, Mahayana Buddhism, and Sufism) theosophy was envisaged by its proponents not as a religion in itself, but rather as the pursuit of Truth that underlies all religions, philosophy and scientific knowledge.

After World War I, Dynowska moved to Warsaw to (re)organize the theosophical movement in service of the newly re-established independent Polish state. In 1923, the Polish Theosophical

² All Sanskrit titles, names, and terms are spelled here in a simplified anglicized version, without diacritics.

Society (PTS), with Dynowska as secretary general, officially became a branch of the Theosophical Society based in Adyar, India (Hess, 2015, pp. 55). This phase of activity was reflected in her translation work. In 1919, a Warsaw publishing cooperative named “Adyar” brought out what seems to have been her first book-length translation: the Polish version of *At the Feet of the Master* by the Indian thinker Jiddu Krishnamurti, a key figure in the theosophical movement and Dynowska’s fascination for decades to come (Tokarski, 1994, pp. 98-100). In the following years, “Adyar”, the PTS, and its press organ, *Przegląd Teozoficzny* (“Theosophical Review”), published a number of theosophical works in her translation from English, e.g. Irving S. Cooper’s *Reincarnation* (1928).

Apart from translating crucial theosophical texts in connection with her official function, Dynowska also followed more personal and literary fascinations. In 1930 in Paris, she came across *The Prophet* (1923), a mystic poem by the Lebanese-born author Khalil Gibran, a Maronite Christian influenced by Sufism and theosophy, whose works would later become immensely popular with representatives of the New Age movement. Struck by the originality, “depth of thought”, and “Beauty” of the text (Dynowska in Gibran, 1954, pp. vi-vii), she immediately translated selected chapters and circulated them among friends; the book was published in whole only in 1954 in India (followed in 1956 by another translation from Gibran: the volume of gospel-inspired stories *Jesus, the Son of Man*).

Dynowska moved away from institutionalized Catholic church³, but not from the Christian God, whom she experienced in nature, as testified in her diary entry from a hike in the Polish Tatra mountains shortly before leaving for India:

I feel constrained in the church, even during the mystery of the Mass and the rituals whose power I know, yet do not resonate with it today. There, God is set in ready-made forms, long enclosed, [He is] revered consciously, intellectually loved. From my soul nothing comes as a response. He does not speak to it from the altar. But here He is alive. (Dynowska, [1935] 1948, pp. 205-206)⁴

In 1935, Dynowska travelled to Adyar to attend the Congress of the Theosophical Society, and, fascinated by India, kept prolonging her stay. Over the next four years, she travelled extensively, studied under the Hindu guru Shri Ramana Maharshi (whom she believed to have “spiritually brought” her to India; Dynowska, 1971, p. xxvii), met Gandhi and got involved with the Indian National Congress, and adopted the Indian name Umadevi⁵, which she used interchangeably or jointly with the Polish one. This did not mean, however, that she already then decided to settle in India. She maintained contact with her homeland through copious correspondence, and at the outbreak of World War II she tried to return to support Poland’s fight and to reunite with her ageing mother. She travelled all the way to Romania, but did not manage to get through the Polish border. Having returned to India, she found employment in the Polish consulate in Bombay. Interestingly, her position there can be interpreted as a case of conflicted allegiance. As an official governmental body, the consulate depended on good relations with British authorities, so Dynowska’s endorsement of the Indian independence movement was a source of tension (Hradyska, 1971). Yet she stood by it, seeing parallels

³ According to Kazimierz Tokarski, in the 1920s, she turned to the Liberal Catholic Church: “she became enthusiastic about the prospect of establishing this church in Poland and translated the liturgy” (1994, p. 93).

⁴ All translations from Polish sources are by the authors of this article.

⁵ According to Hindu myths, Uma (Sanskrit Umā) is the name of a daughter of Himavat, who personifies the Himalayan mountains; she married god Śiva. The term itself may denote splendor, light, fame, reputation, quiet, night, or even turmeric. Devi (Sanskrit devī) means a goddess, queen or a high-ranked woman, worship, reverence. The compound appears to convey the meaning of ‘Goddess Uma’.

between the British Empire's colonial rule and the oppression of Poles by the Russian Empire and then Soviet Union (Dynowska, 1938-1939, undated). The post-war dominance of the latter contributed to her decision to stay in India; having adopted Indian citizenship, she only visited communist Poland twice, in the 1960s. Thus, although for several years Dynowska's livelihood in a sense depended on a white supremacist system (cf. Hooks, 2015), her perception of India and Indians was far from imperialist – which is not to say that it was not biased in another way. Dynowska embarked on a lifetime mission to bring together Poles and Indians — through translation, publishing and editorial work, and journalism, as well as numerous educational, cultural and social initiatives, especially with the community of Polish World War II refugees in India. As follows from her late 1930s correspondence with her literary agent in Warsaw, Tadeusz Szukiewicz, among the topics with which she tried to interest Polish editors and publishers (mostly unsuccessfully) was "the Hindu woman". She felt that this aspect of Indian society is misunderstood by Europeans; her experience of travelling as a single woman across the country was different. In her scathing review of a book of travel writing by Hanna Skarbek-Peretjatkowicz, which appeared in Poland in 1936, Dynowska blamed the author, among other things, for presenting a distorted view:

[...] no holy book of Hinduism describes the woman as morally or socially inferior to man. [...] Respect for the woman in general, and almost reverence for the older woman, especially the mother and grandmother, is the basis of Hindu life. [...] Mrs Skarbek-Peretj[at]kowicz completely misrepresents the social position of the widow. [...] Shaving the head is not a sign of disgrace, but, like in our culture, of "monastic vows". (Dynowska, 1938-1939; attached to an undated letter)

Yet in correcting Skarbek-Peretjatkowicz, whose book indeed presented India from a narrowly Eurocentric perspective, Dynowska herself committed a fallacy. Her idealized view reflected her own beliefs rather than the actual social reality. She was consistent in propagating this image of Indian women, also in the religious context:

The various names of Shakti in Hinduism express Her various kinds of energy, that is the aspects of Her infinite Being. There are few countries and cultures in the world in which the real role of the woman would be understood and respected as much as it is in India, and the knowledge about the energy of the sexes is infinitely deeper and more versatile here than elsewhere. (Dynowska, 1948, p. 228)

In fact, Dynowska's general view of India may be interpreted as fetishizing in that it focused on the positives and ignored conflict, as well as colonial in that it ignored difference, treating the multiple ethnicities, languages, and religions of the subcontinent as minor alterations of what she believed to be the 'Indian soul'. This was a projection of her theosophical ideal of unity, of one universal Truth manifesting itself in different ways; well-intentioned, it nevertheless led to a generalizing and thus simplifying perception.

That said, Dynowska could not ignore the grim reality in the aftermath of Gandhi's assassination. Disillusioned with the instrumental use of Hinduism as a weapon in the national/ethnic and religious conflict with Muslim Indians (Hradyska, 1971), eventually, in the last decade of her life, she was drawn to Mahayana Buddhism. In 1960, she moved to Northern India to help Tibetan orphans that had found themselves there following the Chinese invasion. Focusing on charity and educational work, she also studied Buddhism with Tibetan monks; the Dalai Lama himself remembered her decades later as his "Polish mother" (Manning, 2017).

The circumstances of Dynowska's passing and burial symbolically summarize her pan-religious life. She spent the last year of her life in a Catholic convent in Mysore, Southern India,

surrounded by Tibetan refugees who lived in the area (Tokarski, 1994, p. 103). She received last rites from the Archbishop of Mysore and died clad in a red festive sari, in a meditative yoga position (Potulicka, 1971), holding a crucifix (ZŁJ, 1978, pp. 23-24). In accordance with her last will, she was buried in the Tibetan Buddhist rite.

3. Religious writing from India in Dynowska's translation

Already in 1938, Dynowska wrote to her Warsaw-based agent Tadeusz Szukiewicz: "What is deepest and most interesting about India is religion, realism, and new revival movements based on moral principles – would it not be too 'difficult'?" (29 November 1938). She had difficulties finding editors or publishers willing to acquaint the Polish reader with these subjects, and this was probably the main reason why she decided to establish her own independent publishing initiative in India. In 1944, together with Maurycy Frydman aka Swami Bharatananda, a Polish-Jewish engineer who had adopted the Hindu way of life, she founded the Indo-Polish Library/Biblioteka Polsko-Indyjska (henceforth, IPL and, respectively, BPI), whose motto was "to show India to Poland and Poland to India"⁶. It should be emphasized that it was a non-profit venture, marked by financial struggle throughout its thirty-year history; Dynowska used her own savings to support it and secured funds from foreign benefactors and Indian authorities.

Indian religious writing constituted a major part of the titles published by Dynowska and Frydman in Polish. The first BPI volume, published in 1944, was not a translation, but Dynowska's own account of a solitary pilgrimage to Hindu holy places in the Himalayas (see Illustration 1).

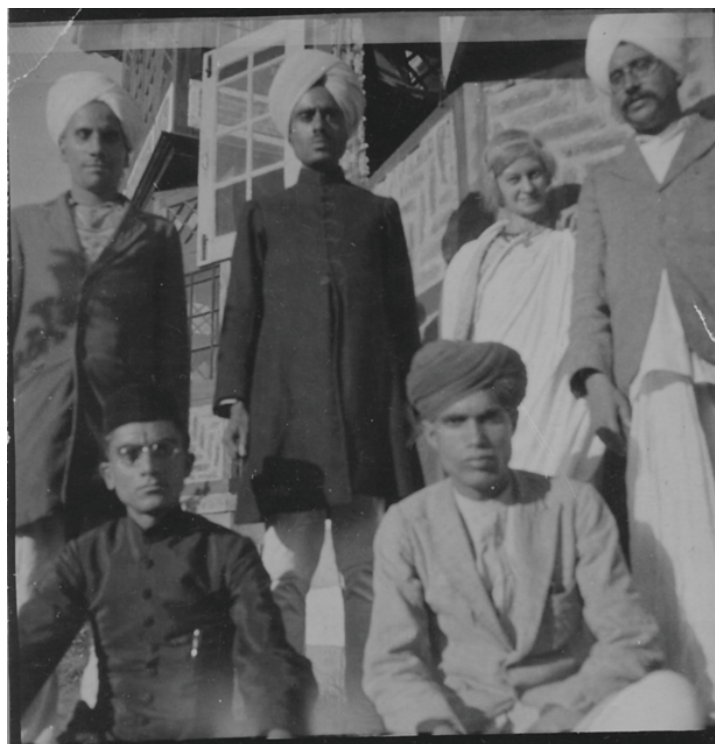


Illustration 1. Wanda Dynowska among local acquaintances on her pilgrimage in the Himalayas. Tadeusz Pobożniak Collection, Institute of Oriental Studies, Jagiellonian University, Kraków

⁶ For an overview of this publishing enterprise, see Dębicka-Borek & Ziemann (2021). Full list of IPL/BPI's publications can be found in Glazer, 2009, pp. 591-596. Due to space constraints, the IPL/BPI books mentioned but not quoted here are not included in the references.

Three years later, apparently encouraged by Maharshi (Dynowska, 1947, p. vii), she published a translation of the *Bhagavad Gita* – one of the key holy texts of Hinduism, part of the ancient epic *Mahabharata*. She might have worked from the Sanskrit original (Łozowska, 2008), drawing on commentaries and the help of local scholars (Dynowska, 1947, p. vii), and likely also with reference to other translations into European languages. Not the first rendering of this piece into Polish, Dynowska’s translation was an attempt at making it relevant to Polish readers in the aftermath of World War II, and even making an ideological point. *Gita* thematizes prince Arjuna’s moral doubts before the decisive fratricidal battle central to *Mahabharata*. They are dispelled by his charioteer, who is in fact Krishna himself: fighting evil is Arjuna’s highest duty as a Kshatriya (warrior), regardless of his being related to soldiers of the opposing army. In this sense, the translation of *Gita* can be seen as the translator’s patriotic message to her Polish readers, encouraging them not to accept the Soviet-controlled government of the post-war People’s Republic of Poland, and to keep fighting, even against compatriots who have embraced the new communist order.

This is suggested in the dedication: “To those who are faithful to the Dharma of Poland, who fight with their lives for the Spirit of the Nation, this wonderful Book of faith to One’s Own Truth is dedicated by the Translator”. The concept of pursuit of Truth was very dear to Gandhi, who was a major influence on Dynowska. At the same time, she interpreted *Gita* in terms of the theosophical concept of universal Truth sought through different religions; this is visible in both her preface and in a brief introduction by the philosopher and future politician Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan⁷:

It is a book rising beyond faiths and churches, even though it belongs to the religious literature of Hinduism. [...] Anyone who reads *Gita*—regardless of the world religion they represent – will find in it a key to the spiritual truths of their own religion, for the Truth about which it speaks is all-encompassing. (Radhakrishnan in Dynowska, 1947, p. i)

This non-exclusive approach to religion could also be found in the Indian mystic movement of *bhakti*, which Dynowska saw as the key to Indian culture. It emphasized the worshipper’s personal and deeply emotional relationship with the deity, regardless of gender, caste, or indeed religious affiliation. According to John Hawley, the idea of the movement consolidated in the 20th century, but it dates back to the period of ca. 500-1700 C.E. *Bhakti* “evokes the idea of a widely shared religiosity for which institutional superstructures weren’t all that relevant [...]. It implies direct divine encounter, experienced in the lives of individual people” who “turn to poetry, which is the natural vehicle of *bhakti*”, composed in all major languages of India and involving Hindu, Sufi, Buddhist, Jain and Christian “religious sensibilities” (2015, pp. 2-3). The Sanskrit term, which can mean “being a part of”, “attachment”, “devotion”, “homage”, “worship”, “piety”, “fondness”, “love” etc., is usually rendered in English as “devotionalism”; yet, as Hawley put it, “if that word connotes something entirely private and quiet, we are in need of other words” (2015, p. 2).

In an essay titled “The Hindu *Bhakti*”, Dynowska wrote: “In none of the eight European languages I know have I found the right equivalent of the word ‘*Bhakti*’, which seems to express more than any other the most characteristic and deepest feature of the Indian soul, since the most ancient past to this day” (Dynowska, 1959, p. 1). The text dates from the second half of the 1930s and was meant as a press article, but met with a lack of interest from editors in Poland. Eventually, two decades later, Dynowska published it herself, as a preface to the first volume of her most remarkable achievement as a translator and editor: a six-volume

⁷ Radhakrishnan became the vice-president (1952-1962) and president (1962-1967) of India; acquaintance with him exemplifies Dynowska’s social position.

anthology of literature translated (often indirectly and/or in collaboration) from different Indian languages (see Dębicka-Borek & Ziemann, 2021, pp. 72-74). Dynowska leaves the word *bhakti* untranslated or renders it into Polish as *żarliwa miłość*, "ardent love". She emphasizes that, in order to understand it, one must immerse oneself in Indian nature and Indian life, rather than studying "old Sanskrit texts" (Dynowska, 1959, p. 3). Not only was the bhakti tradition amply represented in the anthology, but the concept was regarded by Dynowska as legitimizing her whole project: "This and only this [experience-based understanding of bhakti] gives me the right to speak of this aspect of the Indian soul and to attempt to translate into Polish a number of songs, both most ancient and modern: folk songs, by anonymous as well as famous and great poets" (Dynowska, 1959, p. 3).

Alongside occasional examples of secular writing, Dynowska's anthology, whose successive volumes were published in the 1950s and 1960s in two editions, comprised many religious and philosophical texts, mainly ancient and early modern, from various traditions. For the Sanskrit volume, she translated excerpts from the holy Vedic hymns, the Upanishads, Yoga Vasishta (a religious-philosophical treatise), Puranic hymns praising Vishnu, Shiva, and the Goddess, excerpts from the *Mahabharata*, the writings of Kashmiri Shaivites, and Buddhist books. The Tamil volume included excerpts from the Tamil *Ramayana* and bhakti poems of Alvars and Nayanmars (Vaishnava and Shaiva saints, respectively), Hindi – the works of bhakti poets and mystics (e.g. Ramananda, Kabir, Dadu, the 16th-century female poet Mirabai), excerpts of Tulsidas' adaptation of the *Ramayana*, Surdas' songs celebrating Krishna; Gujarati – Krishnaite songs of Narasimha and Dayaram (bhakti); Marathi – poems in the bhakti tradition (e.g. Tukaram); Bengali – Buddhist works, songs of the Bauls (minstrels with syncretic beliefs, chiefly based on Sufism and Bengali Tantric Vaishnavism), classical Vaishnava poetry, hymns to Shakti.

Dynowska's introduction to the Marathi volume contains a telling example of her universalizing interpretation of the concept of bhakti. In the context of the cult of Krishna, she writes:

These oddest mystics of love express the unfathomable source of most delicate, most ecstatic feelings that the human heart is capable of. Very often, in all religions, the object of this cult in the *Divine Birth-Giver, Matrix of Universe* — whether we call Her Mother of God or a Hindu calls her by hundredths names, depending on Her form which he addresses—power, love, or action: *Durga, Lakshmi, Sarasvati*, etc. etc., or a Chinese [calls Her] Mother *Kuan Yin*, there is no difference whatsoever [sic] in the content or direction of adoration. The most ardent, fondest love is also bestowed on the *Divine Child*, whether *Christling* [Pol. *Chrystusik*, Christ + diminutive suffix] in the stable or *Shri Krishna* in the midst of child's play and mischief or as a Lad with a flute, using the power of its harmony to summon the souls [...]. (Dynowska, 1960, p. vii)

The likening of young Krishna to baby Jesus is somewhat risky, since the souls summoned by the Hindu god through the music of his flute were symbolized by young and attractive female devotees, evoking an erotic fascination (Kinsley, 1988, pp. 84-85).

Having turned to Buddhism, Dynowska brought out Buddhist texts in individual volumes, although in general her translation activity decreased in the 1960s, as she devoted most of her time to working with Tibetan youth. In 1962, she published the translation of *The Gospel of Buddha* by Paul Carus (English original 1894), followed in 1965 by an edited collection of excerpts from Mahayana Buddhism writings, and in 1967 by an anonymous Tibetan folk song on Buddha's dharma. As suggested in her handwritten dedication in a copy of the Mahayana volume, what Dynowska found particularly attractive about it was the concept of the selfless, noble Boddhisattva, an altruistic being on the path to Buddhahood.

Dynowska's religious translations included also works by contemporary spiritual masters, such as the above-mentioned Shri Ramana Maharshi (1957), Shri Aurobindo (two books on yoga, 1958 and 1962) and Swami Vivekananda (*Karma Joga*, 1962). Among the translations of classical religious and philosophical texts on the one hand and works by well-known contemporary spiritual teachers on the other, there stands out a work by a living female author far less recognised than the gurus who usually captured Dynowska's attention.

4. Raihana Tyabji's *The Heart of a Gopi* and its Polish translation

Raihana Tyabji (1901-1975) was born into an influential Muslim clan. Her maternal grandfather, Badruddin Tyabji, was the third President of the Indian National Congress. Her mother, Ameena, advocated girls' education and India's freedom from the British, and her father, Abbas, educated in London, after his career as the chief judge in the then Baroda state, joined Gandhi's movement (Thakkar and Mehta, 2011, p. 155, Lambert-Hurley, 2013, pp. 573-574). Today Raihana Tyabji is mostly remembered as one of the closest associates of Gandhi (cf. Mehta, 1977; Thakkar & Mehta, 2011) and contributor to the dialogue between Hindu and Muslim communities and the fight for women's empowerment. Although towards the end of her life she disagreed with some of Gandhi's concepts (e.g. celibacy in marriage, depriving women of colourful garments, unconditional non-violence), she remained faithful to his main principles. Since 1947, the year of India's proclamation of independence, she lived in Gandhi's ashram in New Delhi, where she was perceived as a holy woman who treated “neurotic patients of all kinds” due to her “devotional calling” (Mehta, 1977, pp. 209-210). She was also known as a gifted singer and composer of bhajans, devotional songs.

In her seventies, she thus described her religious identity:

I am Sufi. I don't call myself Mussalman because I don't believe in and do not belong to the Mussalman sect. But I am Islamic, in that I accept whole-heartedly the blessed tenets of Islam, and the way that I live my way of living, is that of a Muslim monastery. (Thakkar & Mehta 2011, p. 217)

And: “My own path is that of *bhakti*, the path of merging” (Thakkar & Mehta, 2011, p. 228).

In 1926, Tyabji wrote a short book of prose, which she claimed to be an outcome of “a tremendous, irresistible urge to write” about Krishna (cf. Lambert-Hurley, 2014, p. 570). For three days, the story “came pouring out [...] faster than the ink could flow”, and the author “had a distinct sensation of being possessed by some force outside [her]self” (Tyabji, 1941, pp. v-vi). Having understood that this is “the revelation of God's way with a soul that is ripe for spiritual awakening”, where “the soul turns into a Gopi, sees him, and lives [...] near His Feet, for ever afterwards”, she called the book *The Heart of a Gopi* (Tyabji, 1941, pp. vi-vii).

Encouraged by her father and her close friend Kaka Saheb Kalekar (a disciple of Gandhi; Tyabji, 1941, p. vii), Raihana self-published the book only in 1936, although it had likely been circulated before (Mukul, 2015, p. 74). Letters by Hanuman Prasad Poddar, who in early 1920s co-established the publishing house Gita Press and the magazine *Kalyan*, both serving as platforms for Hindu nationalists, reveal, however, that she wanted to publish *Gopi* with his press. Explaining his refusal to Tyabji, Poddar argued that the publication could lead to her being accused of not adhering to Islam (Mukul, 2015, pp. 74-75). On the other hand, he published Tyabji's nine articles in *Kalyan*, four out of which were on Krishna (Mukul 2015, p. 393).

The Heart of a Gopi employs the traditional trope of the god Krishna frolicking with Radha and other gopis, i.e. milkmaids, in Vrindavan. In the context of religious movements focused on Krishna as a cowherd, this motif serves as a powerful metaphor of a god-human relationship. Radha is already married, hence her passion for Krishna breaks social norms: whereas she

symbolizes a devotee eager to sacrifice everything to be close to the god, Krishna stands for the charming and attractive god (Kinsley, 1988, pp. 81-82).

Tyabji's protagonist and first-person narrator is Sharmila, a girl from a rich family married to a poor cowherd, whose sisters and mother abuse her continuously. After a chance encounter with a group of gopis excited about Krishna, Sharmila, too, becomes fascinated with the playful young god; she feels his presence, and finally starts seeing him. Her love for Krishna helps her suffer insults from her sister-in-law. Yet, as she explains to her concerned husband, what she loves in Krishna is not his body but his soul and virtues (Tyabji, 1941, pp. 62-63). The tale ends with a scene where the whole family, including Sharmila's parents, husband, and his sisters and parents praise Krishna upon his appearance. Full of vivid, detailed descriptions of nature and song and dance, as well as passionate confessions of love, the book's imagery and tone merges religious worship with pastoral and erotic elements.

The Heart of a Gopi attracted substantial attention; it had several reeditions (1941, 1953, 1971, 1977) and was translated into French (1938, 2016), German (1977), Dutch (1995), and Telugu (1984, 1992). As Siobhan Lambert-Hurley argues, the text owed its success chiefly to crossing the boundaries between various religious traditions and thus rejecting “an exclusively ‘Hindu’ or ‘Muslim’ (or, indeed, ‘Sikh’ or ‘Christian’) paradigm”, a feature observable also in the case of other South Indian figures and communities, who due to their rejection of organized forms of worship in Hinduism and Islam became important both for the bhakti movement and Sikh sects, or Sufi poets who integrated Hindu, mostly Krishnaite, elements into Muslim poetry (2014, p. 571). Another factor which might have contributed to the continuous interest in *The Heart of a Gopi* is that it can be read as “a personal narrative, an evocation of the self” (Lambert-Hurley, 2014, p. 572), with Sharmila as the author's alter-ego. Seen this way, the metaphorical language of bhakti allows Tyabji to justify her own life choices, chiefly with regard to abandoning affluent family life in favour of Gandhi's ideals, but also to express her sexuality, obviously at odds with the vow of celibacy that she took inspired by him. The role of gopi provided Tyabji with a way of articulating her earthly desires as spiritual fulfilment that is without actual consummation, and it has been argued (Lambert-Hurley, 2014, p. 592) that her model for the figure of Krishna may have been Gandhi himself (Lambert-Hurley, 2014, p. 592).

Dynowska's Polish translation of *The Heart of a Gopi* was released in 1948 with Biblioteka Polsko-Indyjska (the publishing note reads: “Published by Umadevi for the Indo-Polish Library, Bangalore”) as the second foreign-language version of this text after the French. However, the translator must have worked on it much earlier, as she mentions the book in a 1939 letter to Szukiewicz, inquiring whether he found a publisher for it. Apart from the obvious relevance of bhakti, the reason why Dynowska chose to translate Tyabji's text might have been similarities between the two women. Both belonged to Gandhi's circle, worked as social activists, and seemed to share views on religion and women's empowerment; neither married or had children. An interesting translation shift suggesting a heightened sense of female community – regardless of whether it was consulted with the author or constitutes the translator's personal input – occurs in the dedication: while the English original reads “Dedicated to a Gopi I know and love” (Tyabji, 1941), the Polish, here in back translation, has: “Dedicated with all my love to all Gopi – Milkmaids, and especially one, whom I know and love” (Tyabji, 1948).

The translator's preface, titled “About the Author”, briefly presents Tyabji's biography, including her religious background and her involvement with the Indian National Congress. It demonstrates to what extent Dynowska embraced the author's views, interpreted as matching her own, and also suggests a personal acquaintance:

Raihana Tyabji [...] is an odd phenomenon, even for India, which abounds in odd phenomena more than any other country. [...] [S]he believed since childhood in Truth present in *any* religion. [...] Raihana has been a Bhakta (bhakta – a person of passion, loving God ardently) of the one God who is equally alive under *any* name that the human heart gives to Him. [...] She is fond of Christ, Zoroaster, and Buddha. [...] Raihana is a friend of Poland, which she proved a number of times [...]. (Tyabji, 1948, pp. i-iv, emphasis in the original)

This is followed by Tyabji's short note to the Polish edition of *Gopi*, which somewhat resembles Dynowska's rhetoric in her dedication and preface to *Gita*, published one year before.

Deep darkness is flooding the world today. Let us try and share the small light that we have. Let us extend our hands to each other through space and look for more of this light, more and more. [...] Krishna's flute – the symbol of one, universal and eternal Truth – keeps playing its melodies, always sending its song to all corners of the world; anyone can hear it and take this divine song into their heart. [...] Hear it, my Polish brethren. (Tyabji 1948, p. 1)

While for Tyabji the “darkness” probably meant the atrocities surrounding the partition of India (1947), Dynowska could have also referred these words to the tyranny of communist authorities in Poland in the aftermath of World War II.

Given Dynowska's non-discriminatory approach to religious denominations and her belief in the universal truth beyond surface differences, one could expect that her translation would seek to efface the foreignness of Tyabji's text to make it as accessible as possible to the Polish reader and facilitate the transmission of the ‘message’. The English original is not complex in terms of syntax or style; however, it is studded with Indian terms denoting religious concepts, proper names, elements of the natural world, musical instruments, household items, etc. They are not moderated by any paratextual explanations, which means that Tyabji assumed that they would be familiar to readers of the original, i.e. the English-speaking Indian elites⁸ and, to a lesser extent, the British living in India. However, the readers of the translation would have found Indian terms and the concepts they signify radically foreign, even if Dynowska's most immediate target was the local community of Polish wartime refugees, rather than readers in Poland. In fact, she is known to have complained about the former group's lack of interest in and ignorance of their surroundings.

Nevertheless, rather than finding domesticating paraphrases or even omitting some of the Indian terms to facilitate the reading experience, Dynowska usually opts for a Polish transcription without any paraphrase, and only explains them in fifty-six endnotes. It should be noted here that the placing of notes at the end of the booklet rather than as footnotes may have resulted from Dynowska and Frydman's notorious difficulties with the technical side of their publishing enterprise (problems with typesetters, lack of special types etc.), as opposed to being the translator's choice (see Dębicka-Borek & Ziemann, 2021, p. 70). The last page of the Polish edition of *Gopi* contains an apology: “For reasons beyond the publisher's control – the closing down of the old printing press – we had to print the explanations [endnotes] without Polish diacritical marks, which the readers will kindly forgive us”. Either way, the accumulation of foreign-looking words makes the Polish text challenging despite its otherwise simple language and uncomplicated plot line.

⁸ This target group is suggested by Tyabji's choice of English rather than Urdu as the language of her narrative.

The following examples, given in the original English, with Polish ‘equivalents’, as they appeared in Dynowska’s version, added in square brackets, give an idea of Dynowska’s treatment of Tyabji’s text:

They call him also “Mohan” [Mohan] and “Nand-Krishna” [Nand-Kiszor] and “Kanyaiya” [Kanhaja] and “Kanha” [Kanha] (Tyabji, 1941, p. 23/1948, p. 11)

Taking therefore my shining lota [lota] from the shelf, I ran out blithely to the little stream that flows through the tamarind grove nearby and began practicing a new step in Râsa [Raasa] [...]. The lota [lota] on my head for balance, my hands free to clap the “padar” [padar] of my saree [sari] drawn and tucked [...] I danced round and round, counting [...] “Mâ-a-dha-va, Mâ-a-dha-va” [Ma-a-dha-wa]. (Tyabji, 1941, p. 46/1948, p. 39)

That was Samâdhi [Samadhi], that divine trance [...] — that bliss unutterable when the Soul stands at last face to face with the Paramâtmâ [Bóg], and knows “This am I” [Nim JEST. Tat Twam Asi]. (Tyabji, 1941, p. 45/1948, p. 38)

In the last example, Dynowska renders *Paramâtmâ* as “God” [Pol. *Bóg*], yet, as though to make up for this domesticating gesture, she adds the Sanskrit expression absent from Tyabji’s text, which only gives its English approximation: “Tat Tvam Asi” from Chandogya Upanishad. Similarly, when Tyabji writes “I must water that Tulsi plant from which he plucked leaves for worship” (1941, p. 6), Dynowska not only leaves the exotic botanical name (without adding the generic explanatory noun “plant”), but adds another foreign term, the Sanskrit *Puja*, rather than using a Polish equivalent of the English general “worship”: “Muszę podlać *Tulsi*, z którego rwał dziś listki do *Pudży*” (1948, p. 5; emphasis added). In these instances, the translator seems to assume the role of an editor, stepping in for the author to offer her Polish reader additional information on the details of Hindu rituals – not only in the endnotes, which explain “Tat Tvam Asi”, “tulsi”, and “Puja”, but already in the main text.

Domesticating functional equivalence, generally absent from the main text, appears in the endnotes, for example when Dynowska likens the fragrant flowers and leaves of tulsi to thyme (Pol. *macierzanka*), describes king Kansa, who wanted to kill Krishna upon birth, as “the Hindu Herod”, or god Madan or Kama as Amor. Apart from such paraphrases, however, the endnotes offer detailed explanations, sometimes turning into paragraph-long, almost ethnographic mini-essays. For example, with reference to tilak [rendered in Polish in the same form], Dynowska not only explains the symbolic meaning of the sign painted on the forehead, but also tells the Polish reader how it is made (with “red powder ‘kumkum’, sometimes with fragrant sandalwood paste, or, in the North, in Kashmir – with saffron”; Tyabji, 1948, p. 3). Some notes also contain instructions on pronunciation, e.g. “gadza-gamini (gaja-gamini): emphasis on the first syllable of the second word” (Tyabji, 1948, p. 6). Dynowska indeed set the bar for her target reader rather high.

As regards the crucial term *bhakti*, it appears in the Polish text in its original form six times, and receives only a cursory explanation in the endnotes, together with its personal cognate, *bhakta* (two occurrences): “Bhakta – a lover of god, ardent admirer, devoted to the love of the Supreme One under His various forms and names. Bhakti – love, ardour for Him” (Tyabji, 1948, p. 67). This surprising constraint in otherwise elaborate footnotes may be interpreted as Dynowska’s reverence for the idea, which she finds irreducible to an explanation. Since Tyabji’s whole story is a praise of *bhakti*, and it involves two dialogues specifically discussing its nature (1941, pp. 40-41 and pp. 67-68), the translator seems to have believed that the Polish reader would glean its meaning from the context.

5. Conclusion

As a contemporary text by a female author who was not known as a writer, philosopher or spiritual master, Raihana Tyabji's narrative of bhakti devotionism stands out in Wanda Dynowska's translation output. However, the translator's choice becomes understandable in light of her personal interests, beliefs, and circumstances, which coincided with Tyabji's. As in other titles in Biblioteka Polsko-Indyjska/Indo-Polish-Library, Dynowska used her privileged position as a translator, editor, and publisher in one to control which Indian texts would be communicated to the Polish readers and how. In the case of Tyabji, both the original and the translation embrace a certain type of deeply personal spirituality and celebrate women's challenging of social norms, an idea fitting Dynowska's idealized image of the position of women in India, and her general view of women's right to self-expression and to pursuing their chosen lifestyle. However, while readers of the English *Gopi* who were familiar with Tyabji's life could interpret her text also as an autobiographical parable, in the Polish translation, with the shift in target audience, a different aim is foregrounded by the translator: educating Poles about Indian customs, traditions, nature, geography, etc., and, most importantly, fostering their understanding of Indian (and, especially, bhakti) spirituality. Rather than presenting the booklet as a romantic pastoral with some elements of spiritual teaching, Dynowska, as usual, chose to use this opportunity to propagate knowledge about India.

Given her failed attempts at interesting Polish publishers with Tyabji's book and her own essays on the Hindu woman and the concept of bhakti, Dynowska was aware that her choice of texts and themes would not easily resonate with Polish readers, but she still carried her plans through. While the circulation and reception of her translation work in general requires further research, it is safe to say that it was largely limited first to theosophical, then scholarly (Indological) circles. Dynowska's respect for Indian foreignness and her 'didactic' approach seems to have been too uncompromising and demanding for the Polish common reader. For this reason, and because of the lack of support from professional publishing institutions which could have helped distribute her work, Dynowska's lifetime goal of showing India to Polish readers as she saw it – unity in diversity and familiarity in foreignness – proved well-nigh utopian.

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