TRANSLATED INTERVIEW (From Bangla) :

The Creative Death of Humanity: AI Tools Like ChatGPT Undermine Integrity, Erode Imagination, Foster Dishonesty and Increase the Number of Fake Authors

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Editor's Note

This translated interview situates Elias's work within the wider discourse of translation studies, postcolonial theory, authorship, and digital ethics. Professor Elias conceives of translation as an act of creative re-interpretation—one that unites fidelity with cultural fluency while resisting both reductive literalism and the growing encroachment of artificial intelligence in literature. In dialogue with frameworks such as Skopos Theory, his model of translation emerges as a vital intervention in contemporary debates on translation ethics, authorship, and machine-generated creativity. The interview further contributes original perspectives on postcolonial translation praxis, advancing the view that translation is not secondary or derivative but an autonomous literary form—one that embodies humanistic resistance, fosters cultural empathy, and affirms intellectual depth. **— Editor, Ideas**

(**Professor Dr. Khaliquzzaman Elias**, one of Bangladesh's foremost translators, was born on April 20, 1949, in Dhaka. After completing his schooling at Bogura Zilla School, he studied at Azizul Haque College, Bogura. Later, he earned his BA and MA degrees from the University of Dhaka and completed his PhD in Comparative African-American Literature at Howard University. He has authored 17 books of translation of classical literary works. Few have contributed to the field of translation in Bangladesh with such remarkable dedication, both in terms of quantity and quality, as he has. Elias is known for mastering the most difficult ideal in translation: rendering texts

into the target language faithfully and readably *without* domesticating them. From the very beginning of his career, he has skillfully and artistically maintained this balance. Conventional wisdom says that a readable translation cannot be faithful to the original and a faithful translation often loses readability. Elias has disproved this notion with his astonishing command of both source and target languages, blending opposing truths through a linguistic rhythm and mastery that is hard to match.

Recently, poet, essayist and translator **Razu Alauddin** sat down with **Professor Dr. Khaliquzzaman Elias**. The full version of their conversation is presented here for the readers.)

"Writing and publishing an entire novel, poem, story, essay, play, or research paper using artificial intelligence is, to me, a punishable offense. I fear that AI will not only destroy the creative spirit of writers, poets, and literary minds, but will also increase the number of fake authors. This will lead to a state of chaos in both the world of science and the arts." **- Professor Dr. Khaliquzzaman**

You are one of the leading translators in our country. How did you enter the world of translation?

Khaliquzzaman Elias: Like many others, I began my writing journey with poetry. While studying, I would often come across foreign literary works that moved me deeply. I wanted to share that experience with others—and that desire eventually led me to translation. My main interest lies in the translation of classical foreign literature, which many readers here are unable to access due to language barriers.

Among your notable translations are works like *Gulliver's Travels*...

Elias: *Gulliver's Travels* had not been translated here before I did it. Perhaps it was translated in West Bengal, but I never came across it. Before that I had translated Ryūnosuke Akutagawa's *Rashomon,* Joseph Campbell's *The Power of Myth*. Later on I translated Gabriel García Márquez's *The Fragrance of Guava*, and Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*,. Akutagawa's *Rashomon* became famous largely due to Kurosawa's film. In fact, Akira Kurosawa combined two stories—*Rashomon* and *In a Grove*—to create the film.

Yes, Kurosawa's *Rashomon* created quite a stir here in the early 1950s. Have your friends or readers ever encouraged you to write original works?

Elias: Oh, they always do. Their argument is, "What's the point of translating others' work? Why waste time on someone else's creation?" But I believe all creative work is, in a way, a re-production of others' thoughts. There is nothing truly original in this world. Everything is *given*—what matters is how we reinterpret it. That reinterpretation is where creativity lies. Besides, I believe translation itself is a creative act. Translating a work from one culture into the language of another requires genuine creativity.

That brings to mind something Godard said: *"Everything is the translation of something else."*

Elias: Absolutely. Everything is a form of translation. There is no true original—except perhaps nature itself. As Rabindranath Thakur said, the *subject matter* is like water—what we notice is the shape of the container that holds it. Creativity, in essence, is a constant process of transformation, metamorphosis, and reconfiguration.

What do you consider the ideal type of translation—literal translation or transcreation?

Elias: There is no such thing as literal translation. As Borges said, "Literal translation is not literary." Even documents like birth certificates, marriage certificates, and medical reports cannot be translated word-for-word. So, imaginative literature certainly cannot be. Literal translation makes no sense because it attempts to insert something from one cultural context into another without adaptation. Imagine if bees tried to bring whole flowers into their hive—what good would that do?

The age-old debate of "sense-for-sense" vs. "word-for-word," which began with Horace and Cicero, has long been settled. Today, no serious translator argues in favor of literalism. For me, the key is clarity in the target language—readers should be able to understand the text. There are often cultural mismatches between source and target languages, so I search for *equivalence*—finding ways to relate the source culture to the target one.

If an equivalent doesn't exist, I try to render the unfamiliar as familiar as possible—without distorting the original meaning.

Would you say this search for equivalence is a kind of domestication?

Elias: To some extent, yes. Many English idioms have Bengali equivalents. For example, "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread" could be translated literally, but if you render it as "হাতি ঘোড়া গেল তল, ভেড়ায় বলে কতো জল")"Even sheep pass judgment where elephants and horses falter"), it resonates much more with a Bengali audience.

When Bishnu Dey translated Eliot, he referred to London Bridge as Howrah Bridge and related Western myths to Hindu mythology. What's your take on that?

Elias: He was attempting a form of transcreation. Similarly, Buddhadeva Bose, in his play *Tapaswi o Tarangini*, renamed Agamemnon as *Agnimanikya* and Iphigenia as *Phenbhagini*, transforming Greek characters into a Bengali cultural mold. That's not exactly translation—it's a new kind of creation. Likewise, when Jibanananda Das was inspired by Yeats and wrote, "Hāy chil sonāli ḍānār chil" ("O curlew with golden wings"), the poem became something entirely new. Octavio Paz once said, "Poetry is not lost in translation; rather, a new poem is born." The translator and the original poet, he said, start from the same point of departure and/ but head in opposite directions—thus creating a new poetic entity. So yes, translation can absolutely be a new form of creation.

So, translation is both a form of creation and yet not fully so—a paradox?

Elias: Precisely. Call it a paradox, a dialectic, or a dichotomy—this is the very process of creation. It's the synthesis of opposites.

Suppose you wanted to translate a work like *Antarjali Jatra* by Kamalkumar Majumdar, known for its complex syntax and style. What would you do if faced with such a foreign text?

Elias: Kamalkumar Majumdar is certainly not translation-friendly. I don't know if anyone has attempted to translate him into English. The English language is powerful, and if someone commands it as well as their mother

tongue, they might try. Jibanananda Das is also extremely difficult to translate—although some poems like *The Cat* from *Rupasi Bangla* are easier.

Some texts are inherently translation-friendly. But with those that aren't, you have two choices: either translate them as they are, which may not be comprehensible to the reader in the target language (thus requiring extensive footnotes and explanations), or produce a more adaptive translation that preserves the spirit without betraying the original.

After all, the translator is often accused of being a traitor—. So I believe a translator must strive to be both *faithful* and *beautiful* in their rendering.

Translation in our region has a long history. Even *Don Quixote* was translated in the early 19th century. *Padmavati*, *Ramayana*, and *Mahabharata* were also translated. Who would you consider your ideal translators in Bengali?

Elias: I wouldn't say I've read a vast amount of translations. As a child, we had a home library. I read Dostoevsky's *Lanchito Jara* and was highly moved. Then came *Mother* by Pearl S. Buck, translated by Hariranjan Dasgupta. None of them were professional translators—just readers who fell in love with literature and decided to translate. I also read *The Good Earth*, though I don't recall who translated it—perhaps Pushpamoyee Basu. I also came across some of Tolstoy, like *The Death of Ivan Ilych*. All of these shaped my interest in translation, though I don't have a particular role model as a translator.

You translated the early stories of Mikhail Sholokhov. Was there a political or social motivation behind that?

Elias: During our Liberation War, I spent a lot of time in rural areas. Somehow, I had a copy of *Early Stories* by Sholokhov with me. I translated a few of them and eventually decided to translate the entire book. It's not that Sholokhov was a favorite author, but his stories were suitable for translation. I didn't tackle his major works as they're quite long. But those early stories resonated with me—written just after the Bolshevik Revolution, they echoed the spirit of our own Liberation War. That parallel may have influenced my choice to translate them.

What aspects of Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* attracted you to translating such an old book?

Khalikuzzaman Elias: Its sharp, biting satire. The way Swift portrays society and human behavior resonated deeply with eighteenth-century English society—and, I found, with our own. Cloaked in fantasy, yet delivering pointed social critique, that kind of work is something we need more of here. I remember spending two to three years translating *Gulliver's Travels* in the mid-1970s.

You published a translation of *The Golden Bough* several years ago—a monumental work. What led to your interest in that book?

Elias: I felt that this milestone of cultural anthropology deserved a Bangla translation. The original spans twelve volumes, but Frazer himself condensed it into a single volume of 850–900 pages. He first published a two-volume version in 1892 and then added ten more volumes to complete the twelve around 1915—earning himself a knighthood in the process.

Frazer repeatedly highlights how multiple social rituals across different cultures follow the same forms. He chooses to emphasize *similarity* across peoples rather than differences. It's fascinating to learn how human behavior—driven by strange prejudices, beliefs, and myths—has evolved such varied expressions of magic, religion, and science. I believe that anyone who reads this with an open mind might move away from religious rigidity and adopt a more liberal outlook.

I began the translation back in 1995, and it was finally published in 2016. Had I worked more consistently, I might have finished it in two or three years.

James Joyce's major novels have not yet been fully translated into Bangla...

Elias: I've heard that someone—now deceased, Zakaria Siraji—began translating *Ulysses*, but I don't know if he completed it. Currently, another well-known translator, Abdus Selim, is working on *Ulysses*. Joyce is extremely difficult, almost untranslatable. I'm uncertain how many languages *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake* have been translated into.

Shakespeare, however, has been translated meaningfully. Utpal Dutta's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is quite excellent. Sudhangshuranjan Ghosh's complete Shakespeare translation was published a few years ago. Girish Ghosh also translated Shakespeare, likely *Macbeth*. Rabindranath Tagore tackled *Macbeth* as well. Shakespeare's sonnets have been translated by Zillur Rahman Siddiqui—and recently and most successfully perhaps by Selim Sarwar, who maintained both fidelity and meter to a remarkable degree.

Rabindranath Tagore also translated works. What are your thoughts on his translations?

Elias: Tagore was a highly creative writer, so he couldn't remain entirely faithful to the original texts—his translations bear his own signature. He produced adaptations rather than literal translations. However, his rendering of T. S. Eliot's "Journey of the Magi" into *Shishutirtha* is extremely faithful. There are strong parallels between Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* and his poem "Borshoshesh." He also translated *Hundred Poems of Kabir* and portions of his own *Gitanjali*. Yet Tagore himself realized that his translations sometimes undermined the original poems. I read in a Hallam Tennyson essay that Tagore's fleeting popularity in Europe was partly due to his translations—they were not as strong as they could have been. Tennyson compared originals and translations side by side, showing how Tagore's versions might have been more powerful and true to the originals. So, Tagore wasn't entirely successful as a translator—and yet many European readers overestimated his translations precisely because they thought, "The author himself translated these."

Are there any classic or significant works you haven't translated yet but aspire to?

Elias: I once wanted to do *Don Quixote*, but I learned that a translation from Kolkata was released decades ago—so I lost interest. I believe translating a translation distances you too much from the original text. Still, I've taken on works like Akutagawa's *Rashomon*, Márquez's *The Fragrance of Guava*, Kazantzakis's *Zorba the Greek*, *Report to Greco*, and Rousseau's *Confessions* through their English versions. I don't read Japanese, Spanish, Greek, or French at all/ to translate them from the original. But if the English translation

is faithful, a faithful Bangla translation from that should remain close to the source.

If a faithful translation of another language into English exists, what is your view on translating *from the English* into Bangla?

Elias: It's certainly possible. Consider Kazantzakis: he wrote in Greek, and Kimon Friar translated his works into English in close collaboration, producing remarkably faithful versions—like *The Odyssey: A Modern Sequel*. That English text then became the basis for accurate translations into other languages. Such careful, collaborative transcreation enables a third-language translation to remain true to the original.

What's next for you?

Elias: I'm working on Kazantzakis's *Odyssey*, translating it from English. Let's see how it turns out.

Tell us about translation in our country today.

Elias: A great deal is being translated now—many writers produce fluent Bangla versions. I can't judge the fidelity unless I compare them to the originals. It's a good thing that popular foreign works are being translated quickly, but standards must remain high. I'm not in favor of oversimplification in the name of readability. We must preserve the original's weight and significance; we cannot dilute it for the sake of readability.

Although translation has been practiced for a long time, it's only recently begun to receive proper respect. We tend to undervalue translators, calling them "parasitic" or saying they're doing someone else's work. I believe that notion is fading. Translation can—and should—be recognized as a distinct, creative genre. Like the "polysystem theory" in literary theory, where translation has its own place alongside original literature, poetry, drama, and essays, from selection to publication, psychology of the translator while at work to editing and publishing. It's a genre that incorporates all the genres of literature and it intersects with all others; therefore, it deserves that status.

One thing I've noticed: many private awards exist for poetry, stories, novels, and essays—but not much for translation.

Elias: Actually, awards *do* exist. The Bangla Translation Foundation began around 2020, granting an annual lifetime achievement award to an outstanding translator and a best translation book of the year award. Political issues caused a two-year delay, but otherwise it's been consistent. Some newspapers also include translators when giving best-book awards, usually grouped with research and essays. Worldwide, translation had been undervalued, regarded as a marginal academic pursuit until the 1980s–1990s. But translation has always been essential—even the Bible was translated centuries ago into the Vulgate, which shaped Christianity for centuries. The King James Bible of 1611 was produced by scholars and poets, some even say Shakespeare, among them were included Shakespeare, Bacon, and the university wits—an "authentic" work that continues to influence millions of English readers even today.

You wrote your PhD thesis on Chinua Achebe and have translated many works by him. Why are you drawn to Achebe?

Elias: Chinua Achebe is a world-class writer and a founding voice of modern African literature. I am quite satisfied with my translation of his *Arrow of God*. Although I also translated *A Man of the People* and the short-story collection *Girls at War*, these don't match the depth of *Things Fall Apart* or *Arrow of God*. I integrated some poems by Achebe in the introductory part of my translation of *Girls at War*, so my affection for him isn't favoritism—it's admiration for his style. Achebe's prose is translation-friendly.

Achebe famously called European "art for art's sake" philosophy "deodorized dog shit." What do you think he meant?

Elias: Achebe was an outspoken critic of colonialism, formalism, and apolitical literature—believing strongly in an author's social responsibility. Naturally, such a writer would reject the doctrine of art for art's sake. He felt that any art detached from social context was worthless—gold-coated feces/ excrement, so to speak. Real art serves humanity, he believed. Writers, reliant

on society, owe a duty to their people. Anything ignoring that responsibility is, in his words, sanitized garbage.

Have you noticed linguistic differences between Achebe's English and that of British or American writers?

Elias: Yes—he discusses this in his essays like "Africa and Her Writers," "The African Writer and the English Language," and "Colonialist Criticism." Although he chose to write in English, he didn't write like the English. He used his own nationalist-infused English. In pieces from *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, he asserts that English is a language for expressing anti-colonial thought. His credo is clear: "Art is, and was always, in the service of man."

When translating *A Man of the People*, did you feel the novel's depiction of political exploitation resonated with our country's rulers?

Elias: Absolutely. That novel mirrors the political situations of many Third World countries—including ours—so I was keen to translate it.

In a time of rising religious influence in politics and society, how relevant are works like *The Golden Bough*?

Elias: I'd say religious hypocrisy is increasing, rather than genuine spirituality. *The Golden Bough* catalogs/ discusses diverse superstitions, rituals, and practices across cultures. I believe reading it with an open mind can evoke enlightened curiosity—helping readers rise above narrow religious fanaticism or chauvinistic "my religion is the best" attitude. It fosters a more detached appreciation of humanity's varied traditions, enabling one to live with open-minded reason.

What role do classical and key translated works play in culture and society?

Elias: They cultivate liberal and expansive worldviews—awakening wonder and transforming readers into more enriched, evolved individuals. If more people absorb the highest expressions of human thought, society as a whole will become more intellectually advanced.

In modernizing our education system and refining taste, how essential is translation?

Elias: Translation is absolutely vital to intellectual life. We constantly understand the world by translating it into our own terms. From the start, our education system should have used translation to engage with global knowledge. A person can learn two languages' four skills—listening, speaking, reading, writing—well. But as a largely monolingual nation, we should have taught in Bangla from the beginning, getting into massive translation activities and using translated textbooks at all levels. We didn't—and having no language policy, we're paying the price. After the Bolshevik and Chinese revolutions, their governments transformed language and education. We could have done the same.

You mostly translate literary works, but last year you translated Rousseau's lengthy *Confessions*. What drew you to Rousseau?

Elias: I enjoy translating imaginative works—fiction which portray human relationships, love, nature and all that. Besides *The Golden Bough*, *Fragrance of Guava*, and *Gulliver's Travels*, I've translated another important non-fiction, *The Power of Myth*, Rousseau's *Confessions* and Kazantzakis's autobiography contain rich literary elements. Though Rousseau is known mostly for *The Social Contract*, he also wrote romantic novels; in the eighteenth century, when English literature was in the midst of the neoclassical age, Rousseau was writing proto-romantic fiction in French. His novels and autobiography make him a pioneer of European Romanticism. When I was approached to translate either *Don Quixote* or Rousseau's *Confessions*, I chose the latter because *Don Quixote* had already been done. No one had fully translated *Confessions* into Bangla. I completed it in about four years.

With Google, ChatGPT, AI, and even speech-to-text apps are now being used in translation, do you believe these tools improve translation quality to the expected level?

Elias: I am more open to voice-recognition tools—but AI and ChatGPT–generated writing and editing are growing at an alarming rate. These AI inventions are stripping away human creativity, turning people into dishonest beings. They threaten the creative death of humanity. If you let AI edit your

translations, it will inevitably alter them significantly. Large publishers edit manuscripts with human editors, and authors accept those edits—but that's different. Authors may edit their own work using AI, depending on their confidence and integrity. But having an entire novel, poem, story, essay, play, or research paper composed—written and published—by artificial intelligence is, in my view, a punishable offense. I fear AI will not only destroy the creative spirit of writers, poets, and literary thinkers but also increase the number of fake authors. It could plunge the worlds of science and arts into anarchy.

You often translate rural songs or folk verses embedded in novels or short stories, preserving rhyme, meter, and even local idioms to retain the original flavor. In doing so, you frequently use regional dialects or sub-dialects. Why do you do this?

Elias: I personally enjoy reading poetry in metrical rhyme. So, when I translate unrhymed verses or poems, I try to incorporate a rhyming scheme—provided it doesn't compromise the essence of the original. I've maintained rhyme in many poetic excerpts from works by Rousseau, Frazer, Kazantzakis, and Campbell.

I use regional dialects when I feel they help reflect a character's social background. If you put formal, standardized Bengali in the mouth of a street kid or someone from the lower socioeconomic class, it makes the character seem inauthentic or overly polished. I opt for non-standard speech to place characters within their social contexts. However, I don't follow a fixed rule. The tone and manner of speech vary depending on the environment and circumstances. Does a person speak in the same way when they're angry, sad, joyful, or grieving? Their language and expression naturally shift with emotion.

Think of the Black youths in downtown Chicago—whose speech is often laced with expletives. Would it feel authentic to represent their voices in polished, formal Bengali? Translators must work within certain limitations. So, I sometimes use non-standard Bengali—not tied to any specific region—to adjust for the character's social background and to ease these constraints.

Why, then, do English dialogues in novels by non-native English writers—whose settings and characters are often outside the English-speaking world—not seem unnatural or forced?

Elias: I've often wondered the same. Writers like Achebe, Soyinka, and Salman Rushdie compose their fiction in English, yet the speech of their characters—who would not speak English in real life—doesn't feel awkward or unnatural. On the contrary, Bengali characters in Bengali novels sometimes sound stiff or artificial, even when speaking their native language.

Writers like Achebe and Rushdie likely overcome this by incorporating local terms and expressions that keep the narrative grounded. Achebe, for example, doesn't even provide glossaries for Igbo words in his works, arguing that readers will naturally pick up the meanings from repeated contextual use. Another reason such dialogues feel natural is that readers approach these books already knowing they're reading an English novel—so they expect the characters to speak English. This expectation smooths over the linguistic discrepancy. When the regional traits of a character still come through in English, it feels authentic. In such cases, language barriers fade, and the characters take on a kind of universality.

Creating characters this way demands great skill and sensitivity from the novelist.

From an anti-colonial perspective, Achebe criticizes Joseph Conrad. Do you think this criticism is valid from a literary standpoint?

Elias: Achebe's novels are deeply rooted in the impact of British colonial rule on Nigeria. His first three novels chronicle the arrival of the British and the resulting disruption in the traditional Igbo society. The next two explore the post-independence era, with its political instability, corruption, and misrule. Naturally, as a socially conscious writer, Achebe adopts an anti-colonial stance.

Now, when an author conveys themes of racism or colonialism as if they're justifiable—and does so through masterful literary techniques—should we accept that? Isn't it like serving poison in a golden goblet? Wouldn't you discard both the goblet and its contents?

An artwork is evaluated in terms of both its *content* and *form*—they can't be separated. As Kazantzakis says, just as the human body and soul are born together and not apart, so too are content and form in art. I believe it's the content that ultimately dictates the form. Therefore, I find Achebe's critique of Conrad—especially *Heart of Darkness*—completely justified.

A slightly divergent question—how should we evaluate a writer: through a political lens or a literary one? For instance, Kipling was a favorite of Borges purely for literary reasons, whereas Rabindranath Thakur disliked Kipling for his political views. What's your opinion?

Elias: This has partly been answered in my previous response, but let me elaborate. I don't think we should separate the political from the literary one. If a writer conveys a political message through an artistic form with objectivity, the resulting work is a refined piece of art—where politics and aesthetics are not in conflict.

Kipling justified British colonial rule in India quite bluntly, which is why Tagore didn't appreciate him. Even Tagore, who was deeply spiritual, was put off by the overt sensuality in Théophile Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, a novel he read with great displeasure.

A literary work is shaped by its subject, the writer's perspective, style of expression, and underlying intent. Tagore had considerable admiration for English culture, but there is no evidence that he supported British imperial behavior in India. So, his dislike of Kipling seems entirely natural and justifiable.

You've told me before that you follow the *Skopos Theory* in translation. On the other hand, some translators follow the *Foreignization* or *Archaism* approach. Would you say Manabendra Bandyopadhyay's translations follow the Foreignization model? Please explain the difference between *Skopos Theory* and *Foreignization*, and tell us why you favor the former.

Elias: *Skopos Theory* places the goal or purpose (*skopos*, a Greek word, means objective) of the translation at the forefront. The key question is: *What is the purpose of the translation?* Presumably, it's to reach the target readers. Therefore, the translation must be done in a way that the intended audience

can comprehend and relate to. This doesn’t mean deviating from the source text, but it does mean making the target text accessible. A more extreme form of this is *domestication*, or full adaptation—which, in my view, goes beyond translation into transcreation or interpretation.

There's also an amusing theoretical stance known as *Brazilian Cannibalism*. In the 18th century, some indigenous Brazilians reportedly killed and ate a Portuguese missionary, believing they could absorb his power. Frazer recounts similar beliefs in *The Golden Bough*. Inspired by this, Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade wrote the *Anthropophagic Manifesto* in the early 20th century, suggesting that a translation can only become powerful by fully internalizing the source text—“digesting” it, so to speak.

In contrast, *Foreignization* or *Archaism* advocates for keeping the translation close to the source language, even at the cost of fluency in the target language. The goal is for the reader to always be aware that they’re reading a translation. Victorian poet William Morris followed this method in translating Homer—so much so that his version became virtually unreadable for the average reader.

As for Manabendra Bandyopadhyay, I don’t think his translations strictly follow the Foreignization approach. He probably didn’t translate directly from Spanish, and while some English syntactic patterns are occasionally evident in his Bengali, they aren’t particularly jarring or unacceptable.

Many people here translate blindly, so to speak—without much reflection on *why* they translate, *how* they do so, or what their linguistic philosophy might be. What is your view on this?

Elias: There is, indeed, a significant amount of translation happening here—primarily from English. Since we are not a multilingual nation, we tend to rely heavily /there tends to be a heavy reliance on English. Admittedly, a few individuals translate directly from Spanish, Russian, Urdu, or Persian, but their number is quite limited.

For an individual, mastering multiple languages with equal proficiency is nearly impossible. Therefore, one must possess near-native fluency in the target language. Even if there's a slight deficiency in the source language, the translator must still be able to grasp its subtlest nuances, gestures, and

implications. In other words, any shortcoming in reading comprehension is unacceptable. Of the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—the translator must exhibit the highest level of competence in reading the source language and writing in the target language.

Just as you translate literary works voluntarily, do you write essays of your own accord, or are most of them written upon request?

Elias: If by "literary" you mean fiction, then yes—I genuinely enjoy translating imaginative prose such as short stories and novels. But aside from *Zorba*, *Kalochele*, *Debotar Dhanurbaan*, *Jananeta*, *Rashomon*, and *Meyeder Juddho*, most of my other translations are more or less non-fictional prose. That said, I also enjoyed translating mythological works written in dialogue form, like *Mither Shokti* and *Peyarar Shubash*.

As for my own essays, I would say that most of my prefaces function as standalone essays. *Gulliver's Travels*, for example, is an allegorical text. But in terms of writing pure, contemplative, or scholarly essays—the kind typically considered as "true" essays—I have done very little, perhaps none at all. Upon request, I have translated and written a few essays for some local journals such as *Sanskriti*, Uttaradhikar and the like. Moreover, works like *The Golden Bough*, Rousseau's *Confessions*, or Kazantzakis's autobiography all contain strong fictional elements.

What is your opinion regarding the standard of essay writing in Bangladesh?

Elias: Among the four principal genres of Bengali literature, I believe the essay is the weakest. Crafting a high-quality essay requires a refined intellect, a disposition toward scholarly inquiry, and a habit of critical reflection. But as a nation, we cannot claim to be particularly intellectual.

That said, the Bishwo Shahitto Kendro has taken up a monumental task—publishing a 208-volume series exploring the intellectual contributions of Bengalis in 16 fields of knowledge over the past 200 years, and they have already completed around 80% of the project. Still, I would say that the intellectual tradition among Bengalis—especially those living in Bangladesh—is relatively impoverished.

To write essays, one needs to be educated in the modern sense, capable of logical thinking and argumentation, and skilled in academic research. Such a mindset is something that only a few generations of Western-educated Bengalis have even had the potential to develop. The foundational figures of our essay tradition—Kazi Abdul Odud, Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad, S. Wazed Ali, Sufi Motahar Hossain, and Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah—belonged to the earliest generation engaged in research and critical thought.

By contrast, the essay tradition in English and French literature began as early as the 16th century. Before British colonization, none of the four major genres of Bengali literature, as we now know them, even existed in our literature. Furthermore, the Muslim community's initial aversion to English education caused them to fall behind in modern Western learning.

Since gaining independence in 1971, Bangladesh has made some infrastructural and economic progress over the past 54 years, but due to incompetent, short-sighted, and morally bankrupt political leadership, we have developed into a culturally, morally, and intellectually impoverished nation. A dysfunctional political system has weighed us down since the very beginning of our independence.

The English poet Wordsworth once wrote in a sonnet, *“The world is too much with us.”* In our case, I would say: *“Politics is too much with us.”* Our educational system, and the broader socio-political environment, are not conducive to intellectual or research-based writing.

You have written essays on literature and culture from time to time, and your translated works are often accompanied by long, analytical and eloquently written introductions. Why, then, have you not yet published a collection of your essays?

Elias: It is certainly possible to publish one or two collections of essays. But I’ve never really felt a strong inner compulsion to do so. And that drive—that internal necessity—is crucial for any creative endeavor. If I gather my scattered writings from the past fifty years, edit and organize them, I might eventually compile a hefty collection of essays.

Who are your favorite novelists, poets, essayists, and literary theorists—both from Bangladesh and abroad?

Elias: Whether you call it preference or inclination, I've always been drawn to classical literature. From Europe, the United States, Latin America, and Africa—I have read many established writers, and in some way or another, I find them all admirable. However, outside my academic work, no particular essayist or literary theorist has strongly captivated me. Especially, I am not fond of postmodern theorists who tend to avoid clarity or deliberately entangle their ideas in dense jargon, making their arguments unnecessarily obscure.

Who are your favorite translators in Bengali?

Elias: I don't have a particular favorite, but I hold deep respect and affection for those who are sincerely committed to the craft of translation. You, for example, have been consistently working to uncover various aspects of Latin American literature, pursuing the task with dedication and without concern for fame or recognition—that kind of commitment is what I value.

The *Bangla Translation Foundation*, in collaboration with Panjeri Publications, has been working for the past few years to recognize the best translated books each year, both from foreign languages into Bengali and vice versa. They also award a lifetime achievement honor to one translator annually and publish a journal titled *JuktoShor*.

The Bangla Academy also publishes a journal named *Anubad Patrika*. Although such efforts are often hampered by the country's political instability, the work of translation continues nonetheless.

Some young publishers, such as *Nautilus* and *Ujaan*, are publishing translated works with great seriousness. *Ujaan*, for instance, recently introduced us to a new world by publishing a smuggled out novel by a North Korean author, along with translations of several South Korean poets and writers.

In this way, a few individuals, organizations, and institutions are actively encouraging the art of translation. That is why I say: those who are involved in the craft of translation are very dear to me—they are my soulmates. I feel a deep kinship with them.

Translated by Professor Dr. Rahman M. Mahbub