

Transforming police-citizen relations



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Over 190 years ago, then British Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel articulated a profound insight regarding the police force's relationship with the public, "The ability of the police to perform their duties is dependent upon public approval of police existence, actions, behaviour and the ability of the police to secure and maintain public respect." As Bangladesh struggles to improve its law enforcement system, this insight is crucial. We must radically change police-citizen relations after a history of authoritarianism and governmental domination. Our survival depends on this transition.

Bangladesh's police force has had a history marked by violence, oppression, and a lack of trust. For many years, particularly during military and pseudo-democratic rule, successive regimes used law enforcement as a tool to suppress people instead of protecting their rights. People began seeing the police not as protectors but as possible threats because of this historical backdrop. This view weakened the

Real change means a complete shift in how the leaders of this institution think, work, and guide their team. It is important to dismantle rigid systems that block accountability and allow corruption to thrive. Following orders without question is at the root of these problems. The top-down approach forces lower-ranking police officers to follow orders without reasonable queries, which can hinder their ability to make ethical decisions. Workers who are not paid well might view bribery and corruption as ways to get by, making these issues even worse. This cycle hurts public trust and lowers police morale.

By sticking to antiquated enforcement techniques and ignoring community engagement, conflict resolution and respect for human rights, police training often exacerbates problems. Law enforcement personnel and the communities they are supposed to protect are at odds because of this military-style mentality—which was carried over from colonial

internal disciplinary structures lacking real control. Deficient responsibility erodes public trust in law enforcement and undermines the ethics of police work. A shift from an authoritarian approach to one based on human rights would be significant, recognising past wrongdoings and envisioning a future system based on citizens'

Training programmes should shift from traditional military methods to community-based policing, incorporating in-depth human rights, dispute resolution, cultural awareness, and constitutional safeguards, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of police operations.

Independent groups can play an important role in monitoring

and citizens, fostering a stronger relationship.

New technologies like video evidence, digital complaint systems, and accessible performance records can enhance accountability in law enforcement. These tools protect citizens from misconduct and officers from false claims, promoting a clearer system where accountability

within police organisations is crucial for ethical conduct and the spread of democratic ideals. Senior leaders should demonstrate ethical behaviour and focus on understanding social processes. The hiring process should focus on ethics, empathy, and a commitment to community service, in addition to skills and education, to create a more reliable and dedicated law enforcement agency. External oversight is important for maintaining checks and balances as independent groups help ensure transparency and accountability. These institutions should set clear guidelines, implement serious consequences for wrongdoing, and promote a culture of honesty in law enforcement.

Culture change in the police force requires long-term dedication and patience. Collaboration is key to improving conditions gradually, rather than relying on immediate solutions. Building trust requires a commitment to moral standards, genuine concern for community issues, and clear organisational changes. Public narratives should portray the police as essential partners in promoting social harmony, rather than distant entities. This shift requires continuous media engagement, educational initiatives, and transparent communication regarding institutional reforms.

Change takes time. Reconnecting police and citizens in Bangladesh will be difficult. Established authority, limited funding, and strong cultural attitudes will hinder reform. We need patience, dedication, and a long-term objective to make this journey successful. Small victories will progressively dispel suspicion. This allows institutions to change significantly.

Building a better relationship between police and citizens is not just something institutions should do—it's a shared responsibility. It requires everyone—law enforcement, political leaders, community members, and citizens—to come together and commit to the cause. The way ahead may be tough, but it needs bravery, understanding, and a strong faith in the possibility of positive change within our institutions.



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FILE PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Police in Bangladesh face complex challenges due to a colonial system that used to focus more on control than on serving the community. Real change means a complete shift in how the leaders of this institution think, work, and guide their team. It is important to dismantle rigid systems that block accountability and allow corruption to thrive.

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times—and sees people as possible enemies rather than friends. For the contemporary police to succeed, these problems must be resolved.

The system for holding the police force accountable remains generally weak, with unclear

rights, privileges and respect. Rethinking the police's role from enforcing state will to protecting people's rights necessitates a strong commitment to transparency and accountability.

The disorder and confusion in the aftermath of the student-led people's uprising in July and August 2024 sparked a new push for police reform. At the head of this important effort is now a reform body, whose job is to bring new life to the correctional services. It's crucial to monitor a few key areas as the police force undergoes changes.

police misconduct, but they need proper authority and clear guidelines. By providing avenues for public reporting and guaranteeing equitable disciplinary actions, we can rebuild trust. Whistleblowers can share information about wrongdoing without worrying about facing consequences. Getting involved in the community through things like town hall meetings and youth programmes can help police officers become more relatable and build better connections with citizens. These activities aim to alleviate doubt and suspicion between police

is a standard practice rather than just a goal.

A careful strategy that considers the relationships between police and residents at several levels—including institutions, culture, and individuals—is necessary to address cultural concerns. Service must come before control to respect everyone's basic humanity and rights. Officers who get psychological training may enhance their emotional intelligence and communication abilities, which are essential for fostering relationships in the community.

Reconceiving leadership

The timeless art of translation



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The theme for International Translation Day (ITD) last year—"Translation, an art worth protecting"—under the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, first adopted in 1886, underscores the enduring importance of recognising translation not merely as a craft, but as an art form in its own right. Translation, while derived from another origin, emerges as an "original" creative work, standing independent in its artistry. In anticipation of the 2025 ITD theme, to be announced by the International Federation of Translators (FIT), this reflection highlights the timeless resonance of the 2024 appellation, transcending any afterthought. Translation assumes an "afterlife" (Benjamin, 1923) of the original text, with an "always already" inequivalent textuality embedded in a distinct linguistic and cultural context. Reimagining a text for new audiences demands not only linguistic expertise but also a creative vision and artistic sensibility. It involves breathing new life into the original, seamlessly interweaving the sights, sounds, and silences of the foreign with those of the domestic.

Ezra Pound's translation of the German poet Heinrich Heine serves as an example of translation as art. Burton Raffel (1993) insightfully observed that "Pound seems instinctively to have understood that the translation of poetry is an art, but at its best, it is only a partial and inevitably somewhat derivative art." This brings us to a crucial aspect: genuine translation does not simply reproduce the original; it reinterprets it, transposing its essence into a new form for a different audience. In this sense, translation is an act of transformation—beyond the purely technical exercise and the merely linguistic shift—that requires a leap of "dialogic imagination" (Bakhtin,

1981). It transforms the act of reading, requiring the translator to reimagine the text and bring it to life within a new cultural and linguistic world. In his preface to the translation of Eusebius, St Jerome, the "patron saint of translators," claimed, "I have at once translated and written a new work" (Jerome, 395/1965).

If "genuine poetry communicates before it is understood" (Eliot, 1933), then genuine translation reinterprets this communicative act (in line with Gadamer, 1975, who viewed translation as the essence of communication). Translation demands "writery" rather than "readerly" (Barthes, 1970) engagement with the text, transcending mere comprehension. Translation, therefore, should be seen as a performative act—actively reshaping meaning—rather than a constative one, which would merely report or describe the original text. In J.L. Austin's terms, translation is not simply about transmitting content, but about recreating the experience of the original in a new cultural and linguistic world (Austin, 1962). As André Lefevere (1992) notes, the translator becomes a co-creator, shaping the text's impact and ensuring its survival across cultural boundaries.

Historical role of translation

Historically, translation has been pivotal in fostering multilingualism, cultural exchange, and the spread of knowledge across borders. Luis Kelly (quoted in Raffel, 1993) asserts, "Western Europe owes its civilisation to translators, and to a considerable extent, we owe what civilisation we embody to them." The Renaissance, which marked the intellectual zenith of Western Europe, was made possible by the revival of classical knowledge—especially from Greek, Roman, and Islamic sources—through the Graeco-Arabic and Arabo-Latin translation

movements (Gutas, 2001). Translation bridges linguistic and cultural divides, blurring boundaries and forging connections across people and ideas. It also has the power to challenge and negotiate unequal power structures, as Tejaswini Niranjana (1992) points out, highlighting translation as a site for interrogating representation, power, and historicity, especially in postcolonial contexts.

Translation's historical contributions also include facilitating religious and philosophical exchanges. The translation of sacred texts, such as the Bible, into vernacular languages not only democratised access to spiritual knowledge but also spurred literary and cultural revolutions. Similarly, the transmission of Indian, Chinese, and Islamic philosophies to the

anything but endangered. Its inherent agonism—constantly confronting challenges—demonstrates its resilience and enduring significance. As a living art, it evolves with its context, surviving in the face of institutional and cultural resistance.

In addition to economic and institutional marginalisation, translation faces cultural devaluation. Translators are often perceived as invisible, their creative contributions overshadowed by the original authors (Venuti, 1995). Yet, as Venuti reminds us, the translator's role is both derivative and authoritative, encompassing the dual responsibilities of fidelity to the source text and adaptation for the target audience. This duality not only highlights the translator's indispensable role, but also

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West through translation enriched global intellectual traditions (Pollock, 2006). These examples underscore how translation serves as a cultural and intellectual catalyst, propelling societies towards new horizons of understanding.

Marginalisation of translation

Despite its profound significance, translation has often been relegated to the margins. Lawrence Venuti (1998) argues that translation is stigmatised as a lesser form of writing, facing discouragement from copyright law, depreciation by academic institutions, and exploitation by publishers and other institutions of power. This marginalisation reveals how translation exposes institutional asymmetries, inequities, and power relations. However, translation is

challenges the reductive notion that translation is merely secondary to original creation.

Authority and allegiance of translators

Venuti (1998) attributes a unique "authority" to translators, one that diverges from the traditional prestige of original authors. This authority, while derivative, is not subservient. Translation embodies a nuanced form of authorship, serving both foreign and domestic communities. Translators find themselves in a constant negotiation between the source text and the target culture, balancing domestication (adapting the text to align with target cultural norms) and foreignisation (preserving the text's "foreignness"). The tensions between these choices underscore

the agonistic nature of translation. Venuti's concept of "double allegiance" emphasises this delicate balancing act, where translators navigate the competing demands of both source and target cultures. This dual allegiance highlights the inherent instability of interpretation, reminding us that no act of translation can ever be definitive or final.

Relevance of Grice, Deleuze and Guattari, Spivak, and Derrida

Paul Grice's (1989) theory of implicature suggests that meaning can be implied rather than explicitly stated. However, Venuti (1998) critiques such pragmatic approaches for their tendency to domesticate the text, suppressing its foreignness. Instead, Venuti advocates for an "ethics of difference" that strives to preserve the foreign essence of the text. This aligns with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1987) view of language as inherently conflictual and rhizomatic, where meanings emerge from a multiplicity of linguistic exchanges. Gayatri Spivak (1992) emphasises the instability of language and challenges translation to confront the inherent contingency of meaning. Her notion of "dissemination" demands that translation engage with meaning's scattering beyond linguistic control, a concept echoed in Jacques Derrida's (1979) theory of différance, where meaning is always deferred, never fully encapsulated. Translators must acknowledge this deferral, resisting simplifications and emphasising the gaps and differences between languages and cultures.

These theoretical frameworks underscore the complexity of translation as both an intellectual and artistic endeavour. By engaging with the inherent instability of language and the multiplicity of meanings, translators can elevate their work beyond mere technical accuracy, embracing the tensions and contradictions that define intercultural exchange.

Berne Convention and legal protections

The Berne Convention (1886) and its subsequent revisions have strengthened copyright protections for translators, affirming their rights as authors of original works.

However, the widespread practice of "work-for-hire" translations—where translators receive flat fees without royalties—undermines these protections, relegating translators to mere service providers rather than cultural creators. Despite the legal recognition of translators' rights, the concept of "droit moral" (moral rights) often prevails, overriding translators' claims to derivative works and disadvantaging them both economically and culturally. Bangladesh's accession to the Berne Convention in 1999 marked a significant step forward in recognising translators' rights. Yet, challenges persist in ensuring fair treatment. These legal complexities highlight the need for more robust protections and a greater recognition of translators as essential contributors to cultural production. Ethical considerations—such as fair compensation, acknowledgment of intellectual contributions, and legal safeguards—are crucial to fostering a culture that truly values the art of translation.

In an era marked by globalisation and transnational flows, translation remains a pivotal tool for bridging linguistic and cultural divides. However, it continues to face significant challenges, from marginalisation in cultural and academic contexts to the delicate balancing act between domestication and foreignisation. By embracing an "ethics of difference," translators assert their role as co-creators, enriching global culture while preserving the complexity and depth of the original text. Lefevere's concept of translation as "a culture's window on the world" underscores its potential to foster genuine intercultural dialogue, resist homogenisation, and protect linguistic diversity. Translation, as both an artistic and intellectual endeavour, is not only a form of cultural preservation but also a transformative act of intercultural exchange.

Recognising translation as a performative, dialogic, and agonistic art ensures its continued significance in a world that increasingly depends on the richness and diversity of human expression. Protecting translation is, ultimately, a commitment to fostering empathy, understanding, and creativity in a globalised yet divided world.