

India (Language of translation: Bengali)

Jadavpur University Press

As the publishing arm of Jadavpur University in Kolkata, Jadavpur University Press publishes academic books, research papers, and translated works, reprints rare books, and reissues existing publications from the university’s collection. Their first foray into translations came in 2011, when they published the first Bengali translations of Machiavelli’s *The Prince* and Leonardo da Vinci’s notebooks in collaboration with an Italian university. In 2017, translator and university faculty member Abhijit Mukherjee received an award from Paschimbanga Bangla Akademi for his contributions to the translation of Japanese literature into Bengali.

Website: <https://jadunivpress.org/>

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- 2015 Grant for the translation and publication of Haruki Murakami’s *Kafka on the Shore* (part 1)
- 2016 Grant for the translation and publication of Haruki Murakami’s *Kafka on the Shore* (part 2)



A university publishing house established by university faculty and staff, which is a rarity in India.

It published *Kafka on the Shore* (by Haruki Murakami), which for the first time was translated directly from Japanese into Bengali.

Abhijit Gupta, Director

Could you tell about the background to your company’s founding and how you got involved in publishing translations?

Jadavpur University Press was founded in 2012. As our name suggests, we’re the official publisher of Jadavpur University in Kolkata. It’s actually not common for universities to have their own publishing houses in India, so I think our setup is quite rare.

The university established India’s first academic course to produce editing and publishing professionals in 2003, and with it came the idea of setting up our own publishing house. Then around 2010, the Vice-Chancellor at the time actually spoke out and decided to launch a publishing house as an independent organization. At first, there was a proposal to publish teaching materials and other literature being used on campus, but it wouldn’t have been realistic for a small publisher like us. Instead, we decided to focus primarily on academic research. Initially, we didn’t really have many plans to publish translations. But over time, there was a tremendous increase in interest in translation around campus, particularly for direct translations into Bengali from the source language that came mostly from the Faculty of Arts with its diverse language departments. More and more people were interested in actually trying their hand at translation, so we started looking into translating and publishing works too. India has a lot of languages with Hindi at the top of the list, but Bengali is the official language of West Bengal where the university is located.

When it comes to Japanese works, we decided to tackle a short story by Haruki Murakami when Professor Abhijit Mukherjee from the Faculty of Engineering and Technology, who’s also a teacher for the Japanese language course, expressed his desire to translate it into Bengali. That being said, everything was new for us. We didn’t know how to go about translating it or getting publishing rights, and it took us almost a year just to get in touch with Japanese publishers and agencies. It was a continuous learning process. Once we were finally able to establish smooth communication with an American agency, they suggested we translate a novel next, instead of a short story, and so we ended up working on *Kafka on the Shore*.



The Bengali versions of Haruki Murakami’s *Kafka on the Shore*

So you were the first to translate the work of Haruki Murakami into Bengali, is that right?

We were the first to translate his works directly from Japanese into Bengali.

Bengali is the official language of the state of West Bengal in India and the national language of Bangladesh, which has over 160 million people. That’s why we always take into account trends and information from Bangladesh as it’s a large market for Bengali-language books. *Kafka on the Shore* was actually already a well-known title in Bangladesh when we published it. A lot of foreign literature is published in English there. Haruki Marukami is-very-popular, so people already had access to his work in English and other languages.

But there were still a lot people who wanted to read him translated directly into Bengali, without passing through English first. Some people enjoy reading both versions and comparing them, too. That’s why our Bengali version of *Kafka on the Shore* sold well in Bangladesh as well.

How has been the reaction of readers to Kafka on the Shore?

There was a huge reaction to it, particularly on social media. A lot of people have written reviews on Facebook and there were lots of long reviews by Bangladeshi writers and translators. It was clear that they really took our work seriously. Some suggested it would be better to read the Bengali translation instead of the English translation.

How do you decide what works to translate?

When it comes to Japanese works to translate, we usually pick up those recommended by our translators. That's because while we can get by in French or English, unfortunately it's still difficult for us to read something in Japanese directly and find it interesting enough to want to translate. Personally, I'd like to read Osamu Tezuka's manga and other work in Bengali, but when you think about whether other people share my interests or if there's someone capable of translating it, it's also not that straightforward. Still, moving forward, we'd like to take a different approach and explore our readers' interests in addition to recommendations from our translators and get more actively involved in selecting what works to translate with long-term planning in mind.

There aren't many translators capable of translating Japanese into Bengali. What are some challenges you face in translating and publishing these works?

There are lots of people who can translate from French or German in the Bengal region, but few are able to understand and translate East Asian languages, Korean and Japanese in particular. Finding translators is no easy task.

And alongside finding good translators, training translators is also a challenge for us. That's why Abhijit Mukherjee, who's been involved in a lot of translations aside from just Haruki Murakami's, has been working hard to train young translators for us. Actually, we are about to publish two short stories by Haruki Murakami, *Men Without Women* and *The Elephant Vanishes*, which are translated by some of our young translators together with Mr. Mukherjee. Working with a talented translator helps them grow and become ready to work on translating a slightly longer title next. Our pool of translators has grown thanks in part to this kind of attempt, though gradually. We find it important to create systems to support young translators.



The Bengali version of Yukio Mishima's *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, translated by Abhijit Mukherjee



The Bengali version of Takeshi Nakajima's *Bose of Nakamura*, translated by Kazuhiro Watanabe

What about the tasks of editing and reviewing?

At the moment, we do take care of the editing work in-house. But since we don't have anyone who's sufficiently fluent in Japanese internally, we rely on translators for a lot. We do as much as we can, of course, and if anything's unclear, we consult with the translator and clear things up, taking as much time as we can to do a proper editing job. We believe the overall process could be improved, though. And if possible, we'd like to bring on editors who can speak Japanese moving forward.

What kind of works are you interested in translating and publishing in the future?

Right now, we're working on *The Housekeeper and the Professor* (Yoko Ogawa) and *The Sound of the Mountain* (Yasunari Kawabata). In the future, we'd like to work on more contemporary novels and fiction. Not just classic literature, but crime fictions, manga, and the like would be good, too. We'd like to do more and more.

There's huge interest in not just Japanese literature and language but also Japanese food and life in general in India. We hope that our involvement in publishing Japanese literature will also help spread Japanese culture.

(Interview recorded February 24, 2022)
Photos courtesy of Jadavpur University Press