

Translation in Indian Context

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Abstract. Translation has become an essential exercise not only for globalization but also for localization. Different languages are spoken in different parts of the world and of course all the languages have their rich literature also. Through translation we come across the rich literature around the globe. In the Indian context translation is done as naturally as the creation of original text'. In a multilingual context almost every Indian translates unawares because Indian is a country of diversity. Different languages are spoken in different parts of the country. When a man living in West Bengal or Tamilnadu visits Delhi or Lucknow he undergoes the process of translation in order to communicate to others. The literary history of India would speak for translations being equated with original writings, which means that it was a natural activity wherein no complexities existed. Nevertheless with the introduction of comparative literature studies and modern language theories into the academics, translation and translation studies gained a new colour. Translation studies have come to stay in the curriculum of the academic centers, if not as a full course at least as a full paper. Different agencies like the Sahitya Akademi, Katha and Macmillan are making laudable contributions to the field besides individual contributions.

Keywords : Translation studies; diversity; original writings; comparative literature.

India is a multilingual country in which different languages are spoken in different parts of the country. Every language claims to have a rich literature of its own. In this case, a general curiosity is aroused to know the language and literature other than our mother tongue. This tendency gives rise to translation. Even in the very early days, translations were being done in India. Often, in such cases the SLT was the Sanskrit classics and the TL, the regional languages. These early translations from Sanskrit to the regional languages were less concerned about word for word translation. To the translators of the day both the languages were their own and their intention to translate Sanskrit texts was to "liberate the scripture from the monopoly of a restricted class of people". (Devy, 48-49).

With the advent of the British in India, a notable change was observed in translation studies. In the earlier days the TL was often the regional languages. After the coming of the British the TL was mainly English. This tendency may be co-related to the translation of *Geetanjali* into English. Rabindra Nath Tagore wrote *Geetanjali* originally in Bengali language. But on the advice of his close friend W. B. Yeats he himself translated his work in English and afterwards he got the prestigious Nobel prize for literature. In this way translation in English was a guarantee of honour in literary field. That is why most of the translators used to translate the Indian texts into English language. There may be another reason behind this tendency. The translators wanted to show the rich Indian literature to the west

Received : 27th May, 2020; Accepted : 25th June, 2020

by translating their works into English language. Many Indian texts both modern and ancient from the regional languages as well as Sanskrit were translated into English. The earlier translators were the English themselves. Some of the best translations done by the English during this period are *Shakuntala* by Sir William Jones, *Light of Asia* by Edwin Arnold, *Bhagavat Gita* by Barbara Stoler Miller, *Gita Govinda* by Lee Siegel and *Manusmriti* by Wendy Doniger, to name a few. These orientalists were certainly attracted by the rich Indian literature and they genuinely wanted to popularize these texts in the west.

Afterwards Indians also started translation which promoted goodwill and understanding among people living in different parts of India. The translation was of immense value not only to the English, it is of great value to the Indians themselves. India is a multilingual country with most languages having a good literary tradition. But the great problem in this Indian situation is that we live with our windows closed to our neighbours and jealously guard our regional boundaries. The Indians rarely take the effort to acquaint themselves with other regional literatures. As a result, there can be hardly any discussion of Indian literature. The translation of Indian texts has assisted us in promoting greater understanding of other regional literatures and cultures. Moreover, these translation works promoted the elements of the Indianness in literature .

One of the other achievements that could be perceived with translation is its role in promoting patriotism and national integration. One cannot be ignorant of the role translation played during the Indian Independence struggle. Many of the patriotic novels written in Bangla were translated into English and other regional languages during this time. Translated works played a fine role in the integration of India in the crucial days. It revealed that the literary conception of human mind whichever region it belonged to was more or less the same and that they are brethren though separated by arbitrary and apparent boundaries of language and region.

In promoting Indo-English literature much contribution has been made by the Sahitya Akademi, directly and indirectly. The Sahitya Akademi is a central academy of letters set up at Delhi in 1947. Its function as mentioned in the Akademi catalogue is

to work actively for the development of Indian letters and to set high literary standards, to foster and coordinate literary activities in all the Indian languages and to promote through them the cultural unity of the country.

As a part of its role as the promoter of cultural unity of the country, it publishes translations both in the regional languages and English. The Akademi's greatest contribution in this line is an indirect one. The major thrust for the growth of Indo-English literature has been the annual awards declared by the Akademi. Such awards

not only periodically make the major writers and the major works of a region known to all other linguistic regions but also kindle an interest in the readers to present the award winning writer and the book to his fellowmen who cannot read the original. When the language chosen is English, the translator's readership becomes a wider one.

A study of translation in India would reveal that there are certain peculiarities associated with it. First and foremost, in India there was a habit of considering translation as original writing. Translation was being done even in the very early days. But translation done then was considered like any other new contribution. In most of these cases the SLT had been the Sanskrit classics; and *the Mahabharata* and *the Ramayana* seem to have been the favourites of the translators. In almost every regional language these epics have been translated. In Tamil there is *Kamba Ramayan* and *Villi Bharatam*. The SLT for these works were the original Sanskrit works namely the *Valmiki Ramayan* and the *Vyasa Bharat*. The translators have adapted these Sanskrit texts to their local cultures.

Another noteworthy peculiarity about the Indian translations is the TL used. The choice of English as the TL has its merits. It enables to promote Indianess at a faster pace; and opens the doors to other literatures of the West and the East as well as of India. But in choosing English as the TL the Indian translators are violating a very important principle of translation that the TL should be one's mother tongue. The best translations in the world are often made in the translator's first language. As a result, it is argued about the Indian situation that "good translations continue to be rare, passable translations are our usual fare, while bad translations proliferate". (Mukherjee, 31) The root cause for the proliferation of bad translations could perhaps be attributed to the translator's incompetency in the TL. It is most natural that "the translator unwillingly commits errors of idiom or syntax or tone in communication". (17) But this could be very easily avoided by taking the assistance of the native speaker.

The third unique feature of translation in India lies with who the translator is. By general norms, often a person who is not the author translates the original. It is done so mainly as a mark of recognition and respect for the author as well as to check the undue liberties the author may tend to take with the original. In the Indian scene there are many occasions when the author himself wears the mantle of the translator. The precedence was set by Tagore himself.

As regards the choice of the SLT the two main principles that seem to guide the translator are the declaration of an award on a book or the success of a movie based on a particular book. As Mukherjee pertinently observes, "The ambition of all Indian writers and translators were undoubtedly fired by the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913". (114) Though not the Nobel Prize all times, it is the annual literary awards declared by the Sahitya Akademi or the like. When the choice of the translator falls on the modern literature he would find that often

fiction has been translated and that poetry and drama remain untouched. Therefore his task is to try and to fill up this gap.

Every writer has an audience/readership in mind. So does the translator. In that case, whom does the Indo-English writer have in his mind as his reader? In fact, translations of Indian literature are also made for those who cannot read another Indian languages other than his mother tongue, but would wish to read, enjoy and respond to literature composed in other Indian languages. Such readers read Indo-English writing with a wish to develop and nurture their acquaintance with the literary culture surrounding him. Thus we see that translation in India can be of great benefit to a student of literature. In India most of the students of English literature are at least bilingual. This is a great advantage to the students because the knowledge of another language besides the language of study facilitates the assurance that the student has understood the literature he studies, when he translates them in the other language. It is due to this aspect that translation has become a part of the curriculum for the courses of English literature in India.

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