
Role of Translation and Impact on Indian Literature

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ABSTRACT

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Translation is an age-old activity which occupied a part of all regional literatures since the past. The retracement can be traced to the times of the great epics as *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. India has been a multilinguistic, polyglot nation with translations from Sanskrit, Prakrit and Pali into many regional languages. Translation brings to the readers not just the meaning and context but also the cultural, social, philosophical, and psychological truths inherent in those texts and their transfer to the new language into which the text is translated. The present article attempts to reveal a few facets of Indian translations in literature and its impact on readers. This paper also focuses on the nature of translation by Indians done using translation as a tool of transformation of literature contributing to the language pantheon.

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Translation is an age-old activity which occupied a part of all regional literatures since the past. The retracement can be traced to the times of the great epics as *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. Most of the Indian translations started with the translations from Sanskrit, Prakrit and Pali into regional literatures and texts of epics from Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Further, knowledge and wisdom were brought into everyone's reach by such translations of *Panchatantra*, *Hitopadesa*, *Bhagavad Gita*, *Arthashastra* etc., into the dialects by various writers in different languages in India.

Translations are media of interlingual exchange and of intercultural contact, communication, and transfer. Through the centuries, they have played a significant, though rarely acknowledged, part in the cultural histories of many nations. Literary translations, whether identified as such or not, have frequently contributed to the repertoires of autochthonous texts, thereby enhancing not just 'national' literatures but entire culture. (Mueller, 3)

The Ramayana itself was translated and many adaptations evolved by the contribution of writers like Pampa, Kamban, Tulsidas, Eknath etc. Further, Buddhist texts were translated into Chinese and Tibetan. The great epics were translated into modern Indian languages, like Assamese, Kannada, Telugu, Bengali etc. as a way of promoting the preservation of such texts through diffusion. *The Upanishads*, written in Later Vedic period received translation into Persian by Dara Shikoh traversing our lands to enter foreign lands. During the modern period too, translation established itself as a major landmark though the Punjabi translation of a large number of Sanskrit texts by the great Guru Govind Singh.

Pros and Cons of Translation

Translation is really an interpretation, a creative process which can take liberties at the time of the creation of the translation. However too much liberty of deviating from the original is neither acceptable nor permissible. A work of art can't be truly translated word for word. There always exists a distinction between the original author and the translator. The translator has his own expression and style and is in turn influenced by the period of history in which he or she exists. There can be no pure translation, but the translator needs to reflect on different geographical dimensions of a language or dialect, the social class and time period. The literary meaning and the cultural tenor can be well understood through a look into the various English translations of *Gita Govinda* done by Sir William Jones in 1792, Edwin Arnold in 1875, in the 20th century by George Keats' translation and the translations by Lakshmi Narayan Shastri, Duncan Greenlidge in 1962, Monika Verma in 1968 and lastly by Barbar Stoler Miller in the year 1977 traversing across different milieu, mood and context of the translators. Translation thus covers both the advantages of including the cultural epoch but linguistically varies due to different diction in use.

Traversing the Colonial Period

Translations took place during the colonial period and a great spurt was observed between European languages like German, French, Italian, Spanish, Indian and vice versa. However, the notable influence of English can be pointed through the appearance of William Jones translation of Kalidasa's Sanskrit drama *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*. This text became a torchbearer of Indian cultural dignity, a reflection of Indian ethos. The primary attempt by the colonisers was to categorize the ideology of India.

The evolution of English translations of Indian texts occurred notably with distinct appeal for the first time through Raja Rammohan Roy's translation of Shankara's *Vedanta* and *Kemand Isavasya Upanishad*. Conjoining it was R. C. Dutt's translations of *the Rig Veda*, the *Upanishads*, *the Ramayana*, *the Mahabharata*, and few Sanskrit plays into English. The translations proved the meticulous precision of Indian translators into English language. The first translation of Indian work *The Bhagavad Gita* into English was done Charles Wilkins in the year 1784.

Other major translations were those of Aurobindo Ghosh and Rabindranath Tagore who really empowered the translated texts to global readers significantly. Tagore translated the *Gitanjali* originally written in Bengali into English for which he was awarded Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. Translation brings to the readers not just the meaning and context but also the cultural, social, philosophical, and psychological truths inherent in those texts and their transfer to the new language into which the text is translated. The translations of the colonial period could do justification in these aspects.

Emergence of the Post-Colonial scene

India is a land of many varied cultures and languages. Indian states are primarily divided on linguistic basis which had always kindled a pride of the mother tongue and its impact on readers. The post-colonial scene brought with it several translations carefully supplanting the understanding among cultures respecting their uniqueness. Translations supported cultural learning and greater understanding of interdependence. The Sahitya Academy and the National Book Trust enterprises funded by the Government supported such literary translations across languages. The application of linguistics to the study of translation in the 21st century has brought the expansion of translated work. Translation evolved as a tool providing access to the unattainable writings, clearing the path toward enrichment of knowledge, and changing the perspectives of many people across regions and nations. It is true as Woodsworth quoted in his text *Translators through History*,

Translators have invented alphabets, helped build languages and written dictionaries. They have contributed to the emergence of national literatures, the dissemination of knowledge, and the spread of religions, importers of foreign cultural values and key players at some of the great moments of history, translators and interpreters have played a determining role in the development of their societies and have been fundamental to the unfolding of intellectual history itself. (Woodsworth, 65)

Multi-use of Vernaculars

Many vernaculars were used by translators and this could be observed by the emergence of writers in Hindi who speak Rajasthani, Bhojpuri, Punjabi and many other Devanagari languages. In a similar connotation, writers like Shishunil Sharief, a Kannada poet, has poems written in Kannada, Telugu and Urdu. Translation of his works celebrates the variety of words he uses in the same text. Such freerplay of vernaculars creates an ambience which allows for shifts in understanding the text deeply. The multi use of vernaculars allowed cultural inclusion and promoted free communication with others for spiritual and intellectual connectivity to experience the richness of many languages. The identification by the translator of the oral and folk traditions that accompany a work/text in the background allows for the delivery of complete sense devoid of artificiality.

21st century - Era of Recent Translations

Translating from one language to another in India and other foreign languages, Indians have used translation as a tool of transformation of literature contributing to the development and progress of the vernacular language. Nowadays, more than dozen different literatures in the country are written in respective languages by writers. Recent novels like *Moustache*, a Malayalam novel by S. Hareesh has been translated by Jayasree Kalathil which portrays the symbolism of a moustache which acquires mythical proportions through the imagination of the oppressed and marginalized. The translated work portrays the theme and characterization as a collective journey. *Mother of 1084* by Mahasweta Devi translated from Bengali by Samik Bandyopadhyay chronicles the uprising of the extreme left political movement which reduces Brati to Corpse Number 1084 in the morgue. The translation merges both the external political turmoil and the internal familial one of mother, wife, daughter figure seeking freedom and equality of women.

Cobalt Blue by Sachin Kundalkar translated from Marathi by Jerry Pinto brings in emotional fidelity and emotional responsiveness rather than the semantic closeness bringing out the intensity of relationships. *The Bronze Sword of Theng Thengphakhri Tehsildar* by Indira Goswami translated by Aruni Kashyap from Assamese shows how Thengphakhri, the first woman revenue collector under colonial British rule in the 1850s becomes an insurgent. The translation movingly brings in the suffering of Indians.

Ghachar Ghochar by Vivek Shanbhag, translated from Kannada by Srinath Perur is the story of a Bangalore based family caught in the transition of a life of strained means to one of sudden affluence. The translation effortlessly represents the state of affairs of the main characters with creative integrity. *The Story of a Goat* by Perumal Murugan translated from Tamil by N. Kalyan Raman, renders the story of Murugan, a non-conformist bringing in subtle narrative with comforting revelation of characters.

Future of Translation

Vernaculars and regional languages best depict how people think, feel and dream. Such vernaculars capture the lived experiences of all Indians. The future of translation in India looks bright as many translations are shortlisted for JCB Prize and National Book Foundation Awards

in the US. Mention may be made of P Murugan's *Poonachi* which was nominated for the National Book Foundation Award in the US in 2020. Many works of translation continue to flow into the mainstream lists of literature evolving in this century. The most notable ones include *No Presents Please*, a Kannada work by J Kaikini translated by T Niranjana; Mahasweta Devi's *Breast stories* from Bangla by Gayatri Spivak; Anand's *Govardhan's Travels by Gita Krishnakutty from Malayalam*; K R Meera's *Hangwoman* translated from Malayalam by Devika; Ambai's *A Purple Sea* translated from Tamil by Lakshmi Holmstrom; Ashokamitran's *Star-Crossed* translated by V Ramnarayan; and Indumati's *Surrendered Dreams* translated by V Krishnamoorthy etc.

Translation allows one to get familiar with literatures of other languages both regional and globally. Translation is necessary in the future of spreading new information and knowledge across the world. The future will spread across various languages and cultures and in the era of digitalized world internet would enable better communication and translation. Automated translations and Artificial Intelligence Translation will soon become the trend in the future. However, translation may continue to be progress along with history and cultural context no matter how complex literary pursuits might become.

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