Towards an Indian Theory of Translation

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What is the reason that a multilingual country with a 5000-year-old civilization did not care to develop a well-founded translation theory or even discuss, if not elaborately, at least concisely, the nature, function and principles of translation. Bh. Krishnamurti points out that India is a linguistic area and based on the same analogy one can say India is also a translation area. Being polyglots, we use more than one language while speaking or even thinking. But the big question is why isn't there a single critical text specifying the art or sceince of translation parallel to Panini's *Ashtadhyayi* or Tolkapier's *Tolkapium* or Bharata's *Natyashastra*. It is presumed that in Indian context the exclusivist attitude of the speakers of the master narrative is responsible for this kind of a dismal situation. It is true to a greater extent and the reason for this sort of an attitude as traced by Suniti Kumar Chatterjee is very interesting.

Polyglottism in ancient India, as mentioned by Suniti Kumar Chatterjee was responsible in the development of 'translating consciousnesses' among the Indians. Vatsyayan's phrase *lokopichanuvada* which means 'translatibility' explains the historical length of existence of India's translating consciousness. Dr Suniti Kumar Chaterjee in his book *Indo-Aryan and Hindi* has proved that much of the literature of Sanskrit, particularly the Mahabharata and the Puranas, is based nonetheless on a translation substratum from the literatures of Indo-Aryan languages which include the languages of born-Aryans, mixed-Aryans, non-Aryans

and foreign speakers, particularly, settled groups of foreign people who spoke Greek and old Persian. When Sanskrit attained pan-Indian prestige status its speakers became reluctant to disclose the translated character of its literary substratum.

The theoretical reason can be found by alluding to the Russian formalists who were of the opinion that in every literary tradition there is not one but several literary schools and they exist in literature simultaneously, but one of them represents the canonized crest and Sanskrit, in due course, achieved that status. The others existed obscurely. The superior position played down any role of translation from these languages into Sanskrit and with the passage of time Sanskrit even despised the artistic creation in the Indian bhashas.

One can, in this respect, give a very interesting example of a legend which is usually associated with Gunadhya's *Brihatkatha*. Gunadhya, a poet of high merit and deep perception, wrote a book of stories in Paishachi language, a dialect spoken by the common folk of the North-Western India and entitled it *Brihatkatha*. It was about 8th century A.D. and in India Sanskrit was still the language of power, scholarship and arrogance. When Gunadhya presented the manuscript to the scholars they rejected it out-right as the book was not written in Sanskrit. It was very frustrating and insulting for Gunadhya and he decided to take the extreme step of burning the manuscript.

The legend says that Somadeva, a distinguished scholar of Sanskrit, was able to rescue one-seventh of the manuscript by persuading Gunadhya not to burn the complete work. A portion of the recovered part of the manuscript was brought out in Sanskrit translation by Somadeva consisting of 2400 slokas and it was entitled *Kathasaritsagara*. Later on Kshemendra, another very distinguished scholar of Sanskrit, translated the recovered part in 7500 Sanskrit slokas and named it *Brihatkathamanjari*. In fact, this was the first book translated into Sanskrit from any other Indian languages. There are some more translations available in Sanskrit from Pali Buddhist texts; otherwise Sanskrit language with an elitist approach to literature was not used for translation from other languages into Sanskrit.

However, the surprising thing is that though Sanskrit scholars and writers did not care to translate from bhasha literature into Sanskrit, yet they were quite concerned about translation

in a multilingual society in which they lived. Faced with linguistic divergence, they had to investigate different aspects of language and comprehension: learning and teaching, universals and commons in languages and the distances between them, and also the complex relationship between word and meaning, on the one hand, and language representation, logic and reality on the other. All these issues still retain direct relevance to the understanding of translational linguistics of ancient India and help in creating a viable theory of translation.

The scattered insights and oblique hints given in different texts like i) *Aitereya* or *Gopatha Brahmana*, ii) *Ashtadhyayi* of Panini, iii) *Nirukta* of Yaska, iv) Kayyat's commentary on Mahabhasyakar's statement on the sutra of Panini, v) Kulluka Bhatta's commentary on Bhartrihari and *Manusmriti* and vi) Vatsyayan's bhasya etc and also the principles observed by the practitioners of literary translation in almost all the Indian languages stretching over several centuries can be pieced together for developing an Indian theory of translation.

Here I must admit that I have little knowledge of the 700 to 800 years of bhasha tradition and also the explicative discussion in Prakrit and Apabhramsa of Jain aesthetics about which, some years ago, Prof D.R.Nagaraj, who occupied the Indian chair at the Chicago University after A.K. Ramanujan, gave a brilliant exposition in a seminar in Banglore.

While piecing together what has been said about translation in different texts one can realize that in Indian context the term for translation is *anuvada* i.e. repetition of what is enjoined by a vedic text with a different wording. But repetition is not understood as a literal word-by-word rendering of the original from source to target. In the Indian context the reader is never a passive receiver of a text in which its truth is enshrined.

The *rasa* and *dhvani* theories allude to the fact that a text is recoding by the individual consciousness of the receiver of the text, so that he/she may have multiple aesthetic experiences and hence a text is not perceived as an object which should produce a single invariant reading and unlike the western approach any deviation on the part of the reader-translator is not transgression in translation. That the translator has always the freedom to interpret the text though the Lefevier's term "invariant core" remains constant.

One of the greatest advances in the 20th century Western literary study is that theoreticians like Roland Barthes see the place of the literary work as that of making the reader not so much a "consumer" but as a "producer" of the text (Ronald Barthes, *S/Z*, London 1974) and at the same time, Julia Kristeva's notion of "intertextuality" is profoundly significant because the very acceptance of all texts that precede and surround it allows the reader-translator to interpret, clarify and translate. The ancient Indian view that translation is nothing but repetition also means that translation is clarification, interpretation which is obtained by repetitive utterances and therefore to an Indian society, steeped in an oral literary tradition of *smriti* and shruti, differing versions were the norms, not exceptions. The method of producing the authentic and 'pure' text perpetuated in Europe particularly during the period of colonial domination by the Europeans was an alien notion for Indians. To an Indian mind translation is rebirth where 'atma' the invariant core remains constant but other things take a new form.

Besides the notion of repetition (*vidhivihita tasya nuvachanuvadah*) Gopatha Brahmana reflects on the doctrine of purposefulness of translation (*saprayojanamanuvadah*) derived from the Sanskrit poetics and thus cannot be simply explained on the basis of the utility theory of demand and supply. The translation problems are more of an aesthetic problem than a purely linguistic and functional problem and therefore *'prayojana'* should be understood as aesthetic delight (*sakala prayojanamaulibhuta anandam*: Mammata) because literary translation is not just a replication of a text in another verbal space and verbal period. On the contrary, a translated text presents profoundly radical questions as to how the translation turns into an aesthetic activity. The essence of translation lies in the preservation of meaning across two different languages. This notion leads us to the central issue of equivalence in translation. In *Jaiminiya Nyaya* it is said that the revelation of meaning is translation (*jatasya kathanamanuvadah*, 1/4/6) and therefore equivalence here does not mean a search for sameness. Even Shakespeare of the 16th century England in his play *A Midsummer Nights' Dream* did not accept the theory of sameness for translation. The play is of common men, kings and queens and fairies with magical power.

One of them, whose name is Puck, turned the weaver Bottom's head, into a donkey's head to fulfill the wish of Oberon who wanted to play a joke with his wife Titania. Bottom's friends were all very scared and thought they were haunted by some evil spirit.

Snout one of his friend called out, "O Bottom, thou art changed!" His friend Quience went a step further and retorted, "Bless thee, Bless thee! Thou art translated." In other words, for Shakespeare, translation is, complete transformation of the original.

An adequate translation text is a semantically, pragmatically and dynamically equivalent one because a translator is confronted with the range of interpretabilities of a given text and his task is to analyze consciously the superstructure of content based on a complex fabric of language.

Revelation of the meaning depends upon i) Etymology (yoga), ii) Interpretation based on conventionally established usage (rudhi).

Rudhi-meaning is always stronger than the yoga-meaning and hence translation is not verbatim reproduction but imaginative recreation and retelling in the target language.

Indian theoreticians understood the fact that the literal meaning of an utterance is only a part of its total meaning and those who try to analyze the literal meaning may completely loose sight of the real or inner significance of speech. More than the literal meaning the ancients looked for the inner significance of the passage. The inner significance of the meaning is rooted in the context of the verbal art and that determines the 'literariness' of the artifact and without this knowledge the translation is never successful and therefore both the verbal and cultural contexts facilitate in recoding the text by the reader-translator for a meaning which emancipates 'artha' from material reality. Kayyat and even Tolkapiyar refer to *'pramanaantar'* the contextual meaning which means, when transferred, translation becomes a reality.

The Buddhist logicians talked of mental or conceptual images, which do not have their counterpart in the objective world as conceived by Mimansa and Nyaya philosophers. They refused to believe there are any real connections between words and external object. *Netti-prakarana*, a Buddhist guide book for

the commentators stresses more on the context theory of language and investigates the structure of the word fabric of the text in a dynamic set-up.

In the famous Tamil work on grammar *Tolkappiyam* the role of the context in resolving the problem of meaning and Bhartrihari's four types of context-factors are significant in understanding the complex issue of the verbal art:

a) *Sansarga* (two things known to be related e.g. savatsadhenu)
b) *Viprayoga* (relation between two things disappears e.g. avatsadhenu)
c) *Sahacharya* (e.g. Ramalaxmana, here Rama is not Parusharama or Balarama because the compound tells about the Rama who is the brother of Laxmana)
d) *Virodhita* (*Ahinakula*: snake-and-mongoose opposition or the hostility-relation)

Besides these concepts "anubachanam," "saprayojanam," "jatasyakathanam" and "pramanantaram," Ayyappa Panikar has pieced together some very useful concepts in the context of medieval Indian translation of Sanskrit classics which, in fact, reveal all that is said about translation by the Sanskrit theoreticians, but in a new dimension.

These concepts are: i) *anukriti*, ii) *arthakriya*, iii) *vyaktivivekam* and iv) *ullurai*.

i) *Anukriti* is imitation of the original. One can imitate only what one is not. The product of imitation is not the same text, but a similar text;
ii) *Arthakriya* is putting emphasis on the manifold ways in which meanings are enacted in different texts. It emphasizes the creation of meaning or addition, omission, displacement and expansion;
iii) *Vyaktivivekam* is rendering of the meaning inferred by the reader or invoking interpretation based on *anumana* or inference potential of a given passage;
iv) *Ullurai* is a Dravidian term primarily means the inner speech, not the heard melody but the one unheard or the speech within. In a literary text this is the vital layer.

These two sets of concepts confirming to a distinct Indian theory of translation underline the creative freedom enjoyed by medieval Indian reader-translators to produce viable, fully localized translations with a visible absence of the anxiety of authenticity on their part.

These translators attended their job without any inhibition, and they rarely maintained a word-for-word, line-for-line discipline. The categories useful for the study are not "the TL and the SL" or "the mother tongue and the other tongue." The poet/writers attempting bhasha renderings of Sanskrit texts treated both the languages as their "own" languages. They had a sense of possession in respect of the Sanskrit heritage. The whole medieval bhakti movement of poetry in India, on the one side, had the desire of "translating" the language of spirituality from Sanskrit to the language of the people and, on the other side, it sought to liberate the scriptures from the monopoly of a restricted class of people and saw to it that these translations became a means to re-organize the entire society. No western theory can be adequate to understand the total magnitude of this traditional activity in India.

Let me, in this respect give the case of *Jnaneswara*, a very distinguished poet of medieval Marathi devotional poetry.

His *Bhavarthadipika* (popularly known as the Jnaneswari) was free translation of the Bhagwadgita. Within the scope of this work, the great philosopher and poet subsumes the knowledge of the Nath tradition so as to wed it with the emotion of Bhakti tradition. The original text, the Gita, is a set of dialogues, between Saunaka and the rishis in the Nimisha forest, between Sanjaya and Dritrashtra, and between Krishna and Arjuna. In translating it, Jnanadeva adds two more levels of dialogic tension to it: the first is the oral level of the conversation between the poet and his Guru Nivrittinath and the second is the lexical level of dictation given by the poet to his scholiast Satchidanand. In adding these levels, the poet endows legitimacy on the oral as a form of literature as valid as the written emphasizing thereby that the *Jnaneswari Gita* is more a *suta* (to be sung in another language) text than a *mantra* (Sanskrit verse) text. Contained in these subversions and shifts, as explained by Ganesh Devy, were the seeds of an emerging and very complicated Indian theory of translation. W.B. Quine will apply, in this case, the thesis of

indeterminacy of translation and cast his aspersions on this kind of a theoretical formulation (*Word and Object*, Cambridge, Mass, 1960) but the Indian theoreticians will say, there is no reason to be skeptical and fastidious about exactness and accuracy.

It is obvious that medieval India did not believe in literal translation although Indian writers were familiar with the verbatim translation, known as 'chhaya'(shadow) of Prakrit text into Sanskrit, frequently found in Sanskrit plays. But the Indians preferred adaptation to 'verbatim' translation. The *Tolkappiyam* mentions that 'vali' (i.e. an adapted work) can be of four kinds: i) abridged or ii) expanded, or iii) abridged and expanded or iv) translated in accordance with the traditions of Tamil. Kamban belongs to this tradition of 'translation' and the tradition was not to go for literal paraphrasing but for living or creative translation. It reminds us of Fitzgerald, the English translator of the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam, who once said, "I shall anytime prefer a living sparrow to a stuffed eagle" Any text is both word-bound and world-bound. The tradition of translation in medieval India was world-bound and not word-bound.

But where one should set the limits for freedom? When does a version become subversion? When does deviation lead to distortion? One can take the counter-texts like Ravanayana or Meghnad badh kavya or apparently feminist versions of Ramayana in Bengali and other languages or parodies of Mahabharata like 'The great Indian Novel by Shashi Tharoor. Certainly they are not translations in the orthodox or ordinary sense. But they maintain intertextuality—each work provoking us to think of the other texts.

The West, on the contrary, has always been obsessed by the anxiety of authenticity. Perhaps it was with the beginning of the attempts to translate the Bible into different world languages that this question of authenticity became a bugbear. Otherwise also, the European literary tradition reared on Christian metaphysics as says G.N. Devy, has always alluded to translation as a 'perpetual exile,' a move away from the origin and an effort to re-situate the origin. In the West translation is feared as an intrusion of the "other," which is sometimes desirable as it helps define one's own identity. The translation of Bible by King James and Martin Luther is a crucial metaphor of literary defiance in search for one's own identity.

In fact, European literary historiography steeped in a tradition of single dominant literary tradition has always been suspicious of 'the other,' the foreign culture entering in their lives through translation.

Inversely India's amazing capacity to assimilate alien culture and its acceptance of the Vedantic oneness has always paved the way in obliterating the difference between "swa' and "para", self and the other.

In modern times in the West translation has been subjected to scrutiny from a variety of perspectives such as pure literary discourse of Paul Valery, Cultural Studies of George Stener, theoretical linguistics of Catford, psycho-analysis of Andrew Benjamin, structuralism of Jacobson, deconstruction of Derrida, Gender study of Lori Chamberlin and of course post-colonial discourse of Lawrence Venuti. All these perceptions consider translation as a complicated linguistic and literary act while in India it is an inevitable way of life and the focus has been more on the pragmatic aspects of translation. Among the post-structuralist thinkers Jacques Derrida questions the absolute position that a literary text occupied in the traditional critical discourse and argues that each new instance of reading the text is a different occasion to experience the absence of its meaning. Derrida, thus, grants translation the status of literature as the translator like a creative writer signifies meaning as independent presence and develops a more dynamic theory of the relationship of meaning and language (See, *Positions*, tran. by Alan Bass, the University of Chicago Press, 1981, p.33).

Bhartrihari's exposition of the "sphota" theory, almost anticipated Derrida when he said that the relation between "nada"(phonetic manifestation) and "sphota" (semantic realization) is like that of the reflection of sun etc in flowing water, a reflection which is of a steady object but which acquires the movements of the current of water (Vakyapadiyam, Brahmakandam,48-50). No reflection is possible unless there is a substance which holds this. Yet the reflection in itself and by itself is a pure nothing. Meaning exists in language not as a positive presence but as an absence which reflects its independent presence

This speculation, I have my strong view, was very much prevalent in India and was used unconsciously in the 'construction'

of a theory of translation. In modern times it is Sri Aurobindo who endorses the view by saying that a translator is not necessarily bound to the original he chooses, he can make his own poem out of it, if he likes, and that is what is generally done.

However, Indian view being reader-oriented, does not neglect the basic desire of a reader which is to approach translation for understanding and enjoying the original and not to make a new creation out of the original. He goes for a translated text primarily to come out from his own cultural prison and create a vantage point from where he can observe, understand and enjoy the happenings of another culture.

In the present day India plurilingual writers, writing in the language of the ex-colonizer or in Indian bhashas are challenging and redefining many accepted notions in translation theory. We can no longer merely concern ourselves with the conventional notion of linguistic equivalence or ideas of loss and gain, which have long been a consideration in translation theory. The reason is the extensive use of different upabhashas by Indian writers like Kambar, Debesh Roy, Krishna Sobti and others, or the creation of a new language by Dalit writers or the use of tribal languages in multilingual contexts. These are the languages of the 'in between', which occupy a space 'in between' and challenge conventional notions of translation seeking to create new models of translation theory. This is to be seen and accepted as a part of a historic process and then only we shall be able to analyze and explain the 'dalit' and 'gramin' literary heterodoxy and translate it and in the process create an Indian translation theory and also add to it new insights and affirm the importance of a moral radical deconstructive path.

I started my paper with a story of Gunadhya and his Brihatkatha and can I now end the paper with another story narrated by Alexander Dow, who translated Farishta's *History of Hindostan* from Persian into English and mentioned that the difficulties of translating even from Sanskrit into English is equally formidable, not just for himself but even for the Mughal emperors. And he tells a little legendary tale about Faizi, the great scholar of his time, who changed his name and went to Varanasi to study the Vedas under a learned Brahmin with the ultimate view of translating them into Persian. Faizi acquired the knowledge of Sanskrit after ten years of study; but he also

felt passionately in love with the daughter of his Guru. The Brahmin was delighted to have his daughter married to the disciple; but when the repentant young man revealed to his Guru the deception he had carried out, the Brahmin ordered him to stop at once his learning in the Vedas. He also forewarned him not to translate the knowledge he had acquired. As the legend goes, in Alexander's Dow's version, Faizi returned home with a wife but no translations. In comparison to Faizi in the 16th century and Dow in the 18th Century our situation in the 21st Century of translating Sanskrit texts or any bhasha text into English or in another Indian bhasha is much less depressing, it is rather brighter. With the spur in the translational activities a move towards shaping an Indian theory of translation has now become a plausible reality.

This theory does not deny the pragmatic approach of sameness in translation but goes a step further to emotionally reconstruct a verbal art into a different language. In the process the original necklace with a pendent may loose its string and only the pendent may remain in translation. If the pendent looks attractive then don't hesitate to say to the translator, 'Congratulations, you have done it.' May I in this context quote a couplet from Iqbal, one of the most distinguished poets of Urdu, which is so apt for our understanding of the Indian translation consciousness?

> 'Transcend your reason because though it is a glow,
> It is not your destination
> It can only the path to the destination show.'

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