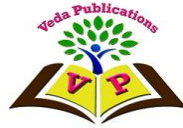


RESEARCH ARTICLE



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LEARNING THE ART AND CRAFT OF LITERARY TRANSLATION

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ABSTRACT



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Literary translation evolved independent of formal training as an academic discipline. All renowned translators went to literary texts in all languages to import or export literary works in a different language. They did so without any formal training and without the basis of any theory of translation. The translators took the texts they adored and translated them. They forged ahead rendering unto their readers what they thought worthwhile in a language they thought best, to the best of their ability. A new genre "Literature in Translation" came into being.

Literary Translation is an enthusiast's art. There is no way a person can be knowledgeable of any theory readily applicable for use for a particular individual text. There is no particular theory for the enthusiast to follow. There are great literary translations which have stood the test of time. But there is no practitioner who propounded an all inclusive theory. Telugu poet of great eminence only wrote about the procedure he followed. None has come up with anything like a prolegomena for any theory of literary translation. Literary translations are basically attempts at bridging gaps and promoting emotive cohesion among different culture groups, language speakers and residents in various nationalities or people living in one single nation. Practising literary translation is a matter of both skill and aptitude. While theories and textbooks provide and impart knowledge, it is insight acquired in practice that sharpens skills.

keywords: *Translation, Literature, Skill, Art*

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Imaginative expression has been oral to begin with. When writing began imaginative, expression became literary and literature emerged. Literary translation is a distinctive offshoot of literature to convey the expression into another tongue. In Bharat, epics were written first in Sanskrit. For the benefit of those who did not have the necessary equipment to read and understand Sanskrit, imaginative and enthusiastic litterateurs translated the artifacts into the language the readers knew and won the admiration of delighted readers.

Sri Harsha was a renowned king known as an emperor who wrote an exemplary poetic composition, Naishada kaavya in the language of the elite then, in Sanskrit. The great poet Srinadha, widely acclaimed by the rulers and the intelligentsia, rendered that into Telugu and embellished his rendering by calling it Sringara Naishadha with a promise that it would be scintillating with an erotic tinge. He wrote the principles he followed in his rendering.

Naishadha sringaaraakavya prabhandha
visheshambuna, nasaesha semuushee
hridayangamambu gaa, sabdammunanusrinchiyuu,
nabhipraayambu gurinchiyuu,
bhaavambhupalakshinchiyuu, rasambu poshinchiyuu,
nalakarambu bhooshinchiyuu,
nauchityambaadarinchiyuu, nanuchityam
parharinchiyuu, maatrukaanusaarambuna,
cheppabadina ee bhaasha naishadha kaavyambu.

He recorded that the work had been 'following the sound that would win the hearts of the innumerable noble-minded and understanding, the intention, emotion, opinion; paying attention to the inner feeling; sustaining the inner 'rasa' ('taste' or feeling'); purging improprieties; following the original'. Those embarking on a voyage of literary translation would benefit by studying the averment of the poetic emperor Kavi Sarvabhauma, Srinatha.

Education starts with learning a language. As the learner goes ahead at a point of time he/she goes on to study the subject/subjects of his/her choice. Language, translation, linguistics and applied linguistics come in that sequence. All the four are the segments in educational activity. Many learners would join Language Departments and some would go to learn Linguistics and Applied Linguistics. Aspects of all these four mentioned combined, would be behind the practice of literary translation.

Now-a-days literary translation is not usually taught in educational institutions. Translation, yes, was a subject during my school days. Translation from English to Telugu was taught in 1953-55 when I was in the Intermediate (+2) level in Composite Madras State in India. But the exercises were from non-technical and non-literary writing. But at that level it was not taken very seriously either by the 'teacher' or by the taught. Here is an attempt at showing how a poem in Telugu can be rendered into English to the satisfaction of the poet himself. The native speaker of the source language (if not the poet himself) who has a fairly high level of competence in the target language too assesses best the success of literary translation.

Literature has an extra-ordinary potentiality to promote emotive cohesion. For cultural integration, among many other things, cohesion of understanding and appreciating our writing is

necessary and hence the activity of literary translation needs to be cultivated and encouraged. If at least one student from every institution of higher learning takes to literary translation, we would be able to take the world by storm displaying our, literary, imaginative, creative achievements.

Practitioners also differ in the degrees of freedom each takes with the original text, for each has his own way of presentation of what he construes to the essence. The individual practitioner has to decide the limits of freedom and accordingly cultivate fidelity to the original. The most important thing is that the rendering has to be reader friendly. It is the practitioner who contributes to the glory of the writer in another language. Enthusiasts of literary translations slowly evolve their own theory, methods, procedures and concepts. Our accepted literary theories and principles of criticism can give us guidance in this matter. Coming to reviews, they are the personal assessments and opinions of the reviewer to give some idea of the book under review to the prospective buyer / reader.

Of Literary Criticism and Literature, the one that came first was literature. Literature has several functions and creative literature takes many forms called genres. Each genre has slightly different norms for criticism. Literary Translation has come to assume great importance in the context of translation being recognized as a genre. The need for expanding horizons of understanding between various language communities demands literary translation into and from many languages.

Literary translation evolved independent of formal training as an academic discipline. All renowned translators went to literary texts in all languages to import or export literary works in a different language. They did so without any formal training and without the basis of any theory of translation. The translators took the texts they adored and translated them. They forged ahead rendering unto their readers what they thought was worthwhile in a language they thought best, to the best of their ability. A new genre "Literature in Translation" came into being. Some theory or principles are becoming necessary to evaluate translated texts. Critiques and review articles on translation have come for individual works even

without a theory as such. In the context of the much needed but unusual spurt in translation activity, it is essential for translators to have something like a set of guiding principles, if not a full-fledged theory in itself. In the absence of a universally valid and accepted theory, translators necessarily follow their own strategies in practice. Though there is nothing like a theory which is immediately applicable to policy, ever since literary translation came to be important in the 20th century context of promoting international understanding, literary translations have been getting reviewed. It would be possible to deduce some principles, which ultimately may yield a complete theory. But it should be borne in mind the theory has to envisage principles to suit each set of source language and target language texts. This article is a plea to make a viable beginning of such an attempt.

World literatures are multi lingual and multi cultural. During the last decades our educational system has been undergoing many changes to vie with countries for rapid development. What is needed immediately is an activity for cultural integration in a systematic manner. People, and to begin with, students, should be helped and enthused to understand literatures in other languages. Good understanding of literature in foreign languages helps promote integration.

In recent decades Translation Studies are offered as a course in universities thought not in colleges. Students are taught translation but no real effort is put forward to make literary translation an interesting or productive activity. Still, regional literatures are coming out in translation by many practitioners who did not have any formal training in literary translation or rendering. This is done out of love for literature with a capacity to understand a text in one language and an ability to express the object and beauty of the text in a target language. The courses are not always put in the activity for rapid practice. What is really needed is the artistic activity for cultural understanding and eventual integration. Knowing, reading and understanding at least one regional literature besides one's own language is essential for the student to become a competent practitioner.

Translating a literary discourse, story, poem or fiction is not a simple act. In this act, the practitioner transforms the text in one language into another, not always a similar language. In India each regional language has its own ways of expression and delicacy of nuances. Though English is now recognized as an Indian language, translating regional language nuances into English is not always an easy task. The practitioner has to be patient and equip himself/herself with special skills.

There can be no one to one correspondence in a regional language and the basically foreign language, English. The act is something more than easy translation: it is an artistic endeavour. If one insists on making translation a rigid scientific concept, literary translation can be easily called a rendering giving the practitioner an opportunity to take necessary liberties to make the literary text accessible to many in his/her own kind of expression. This is an art and not a science and as such it defies rigorous theory.

In creative writing there is a special significance in the use of vocabulary, syntax and expressive devices. These lead to complex problems which the practitioner has to tackle with ingenuity and commitment. There may be many ways in which a literary text can be rendered into another language. Poetry, for example, is a highly imaginative writing which usually lends itself to a variety of interpretation or exegesis. The literary translator needs to be deft trying to carry the suggestiveness implied in the original text.

Some basics in literary translation are necessary to be taught at the undergraduate level to the students in language courses to begin with. There are many kinds of translations. Translations vary according to the need and according to the target reader the translator has in mind. For example, they may be intended to be used (eventually or immediately) for learning a language and cultivating literary appreciation in the target language. These demand extensive notes not only on lexical, semantic, syntactic items but also on expressive literary devices. If the translator does not know for certain the prospective use of his work, he would not be able to give the reader what may be deemed

essential. Pedagogic Translations need to be different from translations for the general reader.

While concerned with literary translation, it should be our aim to take as much of the beauty, flavour and significance of the source text into the target text. In matters of style, diction, expression etc what is most important is appropriateness, aptness, and felicity in the target language. There are some basic points to bear in mind. The idea of a translation, by and large, is to present the original work to a reader from another language in a language known to him. It is obvious that every item of beauty in the text of the original language cannot be fully put across in another language. Notwithstanding the innumerable inherent limitations of translation, every effort has to be made to convey as much as possible. It must be a fairly satisfactory effort on the part of the translator to give some idea of the eminence in the writing to the extent possible. He has come to the translation of a text, which he feels worthwhile reading at least in translation. Literary translation is a service and a service it remains no matter what detractors may say.

Dealing with metrical verse, it is not easy to render it into a similar metre. Many translators translate metrical verse into free verse to make their work possible and easy. No two languages may have the same metrical forms. Each language has its own turn of phrase and idiom and beauties in one language may not be retained when translated into another. Still, literary translation of poetry, specially, has many practitioners as well as takers. If a translator is unduly worried about negative criticism from people who happen to know both the languages well, he should have empathy for the artist, on other words, *sahridaya*. A good translator should brave even uncharitable and unholy criticism at times. He should know his limitations.

Practitioners must pay attention to the unique features of the source language considered social markers, markers of cultural levels, registers, and technical words. These need to be carried into the target language with care and caution. The translator could be faulted for taking too much for granted from his reader or, in the other extreme, underestimating the reader. Pedagogic translations,

meant more to learners, may be an exception to this. Too many explanations and too many footnotes distract. And then the most important thing is the stance of the translator. The freedom-fidelity problems need to be carefully balanced. Freedom is a necessity for the practitioner but how far and then fidelity: fidelity to the present reader or to the original text. The ideal thing is to be inviting, enthusing and encouraging the reader to get the feel of the original text. It is essential to be reader-friendly and the fidelity to the target reader is obviously a little more important than fidelity to the original text.

The validity of a translated text does not depend totally on one to one correspondence between the original and the translated texts. Some parts, fragments may have to be omitted; some may have to be excised in extra-ordinary situations. It is useful to retain some words of the original, especially terms of kinship, items of dress, words of address, interjections, expletives, items of food, clothing etc. not only in unrelated but even in cognate receptor languages. The receptor language stands to gain some loans from the original, when they eventually become familiar and popular. Translated texts can contribute to the growth of the receptor language in terms of lexis.

It is futile waiting for a valid theory of literary translation, universally acceptable and universally followed with absolute obedience. The best way for one aspiring to be practitioner is to roll up his sleeves and sit down to work. With enthusiasm half the battle is one and with patience and with perseverance the other half. After all one has to perfect his own way for one's own self to follow it with tenacity.

Literary Translation is undertaken as a labour of love: it is in itself the reward. A prize or an award is fortuitous and none ever undertook the task with a 'reward' in mind. A literary translator volunteers to undertake the task, quite prepared for self-effacement. There may be any number of renderings of a given literary text, each justified and each having a right to exist as any other rendering, for each practitioner might have given a focus to certain nuances/ suggestions etc.

Translations vary according to the purpose and according to the target reader the translator has in mind. This point needs to be taken into consideration for evaluating a translated work. For example, a translated text is usually prescribed for study in an educational program for learning a language or for understanding the literary beauty of a text. The rendering of the new text in another language demands extensive notes not only on lexical, semantic, syntactic items but also on tropes and other expressive devices. This needs a pedagogic translation, though the term has not gained much currency yet.

When we consider putting an idea into language is one kind of 'translation' activity, translating that into another language is another, more difficult, process. In the first instance it is less complex but the second translator poses several problems. In creative writing there is a special significance intended in the use of vocabulary and expressive devices. Aesthetic considerations play a very important role. This leads to complex problems very frequently. There are so many ways in which a literary text, which is a piece of creative writing, can be rendered into another language. This is not the case in factual, informative writing where the purpose is comparatively narrow and limited. Poetry, for example is imaginative writing, which, usually, lends itself to a wide variety of interpretations. The translator needs to be very clever trying to make his translation as variously suggestive and as variedly communicative as the writer of the original text.

It is the humble attempt of the translator to bring at least a part of the glory of the text before a reader who has no access to the original. For this he tries to accomplish metempsychosis - an act metaphorically of getting into another (the original writer's) body. Sometimes it is an adventure, sometimes more hazardous than rewarding, sometimes an expedition into uncharted waters, which may simply devour him or drive him away into the perilous seas in fairy lands forlorn. It is for this reason that we should go to translations with a measure of forgiveness for lapses.

The reader is drawn to a translated work to read it avidly knowing that it is the next best to the original inaccessible to him, to get a fair measure of

something of its tone, quality, for comparative study etc. He doesn't go there for serious evaluation of the quality of translation or critical judgment there on. In short, translations are not frequently read to pick holes. Even the one who knows both languages has to have his heart in the right place before passing value judgments solely based on isolated slips. This doesn't imply that the translator could hash it out and make the thing shoddy. It only enhances his onus to give his best. Criticizing translated texts should do some good trying to set things that have gone askew straight. A critic of translated text should resist the temptation of fishing in a barrel. To declare that more damage than good is done by any given translation would only reveal a rash judgment. If the original writer has not done any damage himself by his writing, the translator cannot do any fresh damage.

Undertaking literary translation on a large scale has come to be imperative for many reasons. This is an age where international understanding and promotion of goodwill through importing and exporting literary artifacts from one language community to another both within the country and outside in the polity of nations. A practical theory ready for application to evaluate literary texts would be immensely useful for we have to get our texts translated for the foreigners and get their texts into our languages too.

Translations vary according to the need and according to the target reader the translator has in mind. For example, they may be intended to be used (eventually or immediately) for learning a language and cultivating literary appreciation in the target language. These demand extensive notes not only on lexical, semantic, syntactic items but also on expressive literary devices. If the translator does not know for certain the prospective use of his work, he would not be able to give the reader what may be deemed essential. Pedagogic Translations ought to be different from translations for the general reader.

When we are concerned with literary translation, it should be our aim to take as much of the beauty and significance of the source text into the target text. After carefully considering the answers to the questions raised above we have to make a number of choices. In matters of style,

diction, expression etc what is most important is appropriateness, aptness, and felicity in the target language.

There are some basic points to bear in mind. The idea of a translation, by and large, is to present the original work to a reader from another language in a language known to him. It is obvious that every item of beauty in the text of the original language cannot fully be put across in another language. Notwithstanding the innumerable inherent limitations of translation, every effort has to be made to convey as much as possible. The reader of a translated text does not fully appreciate the grandeur of the original but conveying something not meant, not intended and not supposed to be intended would be unfair both to the new reader and the writer of the original. It would be a fairly satisfactory effort on the part of the translator to give some idea of the eminence in the writing to the extent the reader wouldn't be disappointed. He has come to the translation of a text, which he feels worthwhile reading at least in translation. Literary translation is a service and a service it remains no matter what detractors may say.

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Social markers, markers of cultural levels, registers, and technical words, need to be carried into the target language with utmost caution. The translator may be faulted for taking too much for granted from his reader or, in the other extreme, underestimating the reader. Pedagogic translations may be an exception to this. Too many explanations and too many footnotes distract. And then the most important thing is the stance of the translator. The

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In the first instance it would be useful to put one's self in the position of the target reader. The reasonable assumptions that a translator can make regarding the target reader have already been mentioned. Translators would do well first to stop under-estimating his target reader. Then one should be clear about the purpose of the translation. Another criterion could be judging the extent of help offered in footnotes, explanations of cultural items etc. Excess is always to be avoided. The practitioner is supposed to exercise his judgement carefully, most importantly, in this matter.

Translating texts in a foreign language into an English language is a more different difficult job than translating from one Indian language into another. India has a 'plural' society and multi-lingual situation. But it is a single cultural entity in the larger context for Indians share a basic heritage and tradition. Terms relating to food, kinship, things we use in daily life, occupations etc. draw from an almost single large matrix. Our epics, legends and beliefs and convictions are similar though there are differences too. Even when there is variety and difference there is never so much of a communication breakdown. The context in most cases gives some kind of clue to what is being mentioned. A common system of belief and way of living makes terms easy to find in other language communities. When we translate a foreign language text, say a language like French or Russian,

the life styles and the heritage being totally different make translation of terms difficult.

It is the humble attempt of the translator to bring the glory of the text to the extent possible before a reader who has no access to the original. For this he tries to accomplish a figurative entrance into another body, metaphorically getting into the original writer's mind. Sometimes it is an adventure, sometimes more hazardous than rewarding, sometimes an expedition into uncharted waters, which may simply devour him or drive him away into the perilous seas in fairy lands forlorn. It is for this reason that we should go to translations with a measure of forgiveness for lapses.

The translator intends his work for the sufficiently interested general reader who does not know the language of the original text. He is a provider of lift facility to those at the door ready to embark. Translation in its Latin cognate, *translatio*, we are told, has the travel meaning. The translator assumes that a reader comes prepared to put some effort to gain something. The reader is assumed to be interested in getting exposure to a new language and culture. The reader approaches the translated text determined to hear a proxy. He knows full well that he is reading a translation and is prepared to accept it as the next best. If the translation is satisfying, it is forgotten that it is the other's voice and there is willing suspension of disbelief in deeming it as the author's voice. The reader gets the joy of accessing the author. The translator, then, is successful. It may be possible that he has some prior knowledge or exposure, which perhaps would make things easier for him. The facilitator does work to the best of his satisfaction, to the best of his knowledge and judgement.

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Practising literary translation is a matter of both skill and aptitude. While theories and textbooks provide and impart knowledge, it is insight acquired in practice that sharpens skills. For each source language and for each target language a different strategy has to be devised by the practising translator individually. Translation theory cannot be universally applicable. The practitioner must pay special attention to social markers, markers of cultural levels, registers, and technical words. These should be carried into the target language with utmost caution. The translator could be faulted for taking too much for granted from his reader or, in the other extreme, underestimating the reader. Too many explanations and too many footnotes distract. And then the most important thing is the stance of the translator. The ideal thing is to be inviting, enthusing and encouraging the reader to get the feel of the original text. It is essential to be reader-friendly and the fidelity to the target reader is obviously a little more important than fidelity to the original text. Cultural variations, dialect multiplicity and things like proverbs present major difficulties. The problems and impossibilities are many. It is not because the practitioners are not consummate in their skills. The path is not smooth always. It is stony and thorny and the path would have boulders and thorns and one has to go round, climb or change the direction to some extent to reach the goal.