

Translation in Comparative Literature

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I. Introduction

Translation, according to Dr Johnson, involves the process of “change into another language, retaining the sense,” which is indeed the basic objective. Modifying this statement, A. H. Smith maintains that “to translate is to change into another language retaining as much of the sense as one can.” Catford defines translation from the linguistic point of view; translation may be defined as follows: The replacement of a textual material in one language by an equivalent material in another language.

Translation has been described variously by several scholars from different places at different points of time. For instance, Theodore Savory defines translation as an art, Eric Jacobsen defines it as a craft, whereas Eugene Nida describes it as a science, borrowing this concept from the German. Susan Bassnett-McGuire rightly observes that translation involves far more than the replacement of lexical and grammatical items between languages, and as can be seen in the translation of idioms and metaphors, the process may involve discarding the basic linguistic elements of the text. In the Indian context, the translator has a greater role to play. Several regional literatures of the country can reach all the Indian readers only through translation. So to say, India is a paradise for translators, and translation has a great scope in our original literature in the source language. It is not reproduction but recreation. It has become “new literature” may be “literature three,” if you will, thanks to the recent discoveries in the field of linguistics and literary criticism. With the “indeterminacy of meaning of a text,” the need for translation in the modern world is now greater than ever before.

Translation comes after the original and is dependent on it. Comparative literature is a subject, and to some critics, it is a non-subject, its existence depends a lot on translation. In the twenty-first century, the study of comparative literature hinges upon the art of translation, and Translation studies as a discipline promotes the cause of comparative literature in our time.

Comparative literature is a reaction against narrow nineteenth-century nationalism. The best example of narrow nationalism and imperialism is evident in Thomas Babington Macaulay's statement made in 1935:

I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the old native literature of India and Arabia. I have certainly never met with any oriental's who ventured to maintain the Arabic and Sanskrit poetry could be compared to that of the great European nations. (Curtin 178-79).

Comparative literature is a study of intertextuality For instance, if we have to compare a novel of English with the Oriya novel, we have to use either English or the Oriya as the medium, but if we have to compare a French novel, we have to read first an English version of the French novel, then compare it with an Oriya novel and use either English novel or Oriya, the two languages we know as the medium of our assessment. What I suggest here is that it is through translation that we read the literature written in a language that we do not know, and therefore translation becomes tour for the study of comparative literature. Translation brings intertextuality to our knowledge, and that intertextuality is the core of comparative literature. Having said so, let us examine how translation theories and studies have altered our idea of the differences between the original and the translated text in recent times. It is in the 1990s that translation studies gained momentum in the U.S.A. and the U.K. In 1964, Paul Engle, director of Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa, organized the first translation workshop. In 1965, Ted Hughes and Daniel Weissbort founded *Modern Poetry in Translation*, and in 1968, National Translation Center published its first issue of *Delos*—a journal devoted to the history and aesthetics of translation.

During the postcolonial period, there was a shift in emphasis in the practice of translation in India. If, during the colonial period, English texts and authors were frequently and even randomly translated into Indian languages, in the postcolonial period, Indian bhasha language authors and bhasha language texts are being translated into English with a view to reach a larger audience.

Here is a paradoxical situation. There is an inherent competition and even conflict between Indian bhasha language writers and Indian English writers as to who represents true India in their works. Bhasha language writers run down India English writers on the ground saying that the latter are inauthentic for they do not represent the true Indian spirit and English is a foreign language and so on. And what is worse is that according to bhasha language writers, Indian English writers write with the foreign readers in view, and they tend to interpret India to the West. But this is not true. Indian English writers are as authentic and sensible as the

Indian bhasha language writers are or supposed to be. They also write in a live idiom, and moreover, one cannot be a lesser Indian if he writes in English—a language we have adopted as our own—and greater Indian if he writes in bhasha language. What about the bilingual writers like Manoj Das, Kamala Das, Jayanta Mahapatra and a few others? What about the self-translators like Rabindranath Tagore and Girish Karnad? Do they become less authentic when they write in English and more authentic when they write in or transcreate into English?

II. Conclusion

The paradox is that most of the well-known bhasha language writers want to get translated into English. As a result of which we have a vast body of literature called Indian literature in English translation in our country. A. K. Ramanujan, an Indian English poet and a translator par excellence, has translated a vast body of Kannada literature into English. The works of Prem Chand, Tagore, U. R. Ananthamurthy, Gopinath Mohanty, Vijay Tendulkar, to name a few, are all available in English translation. The practice of translation in India is now more from bhasha literatures into English than from English literature into Indian languages.

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