

# Changing Role of Translation in The Indian Context

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**Abstract:** India is a multilingual country with 22 languages recognized in the 8<sup>th</sup> schedule of the constitution. We keep translating unconsciously from our mother – tongue when we communicate with people from different languages. ‘Indian literature’ and ‘Indian culture’ would have been impossible in the absence of translation. Translation plays a great role in knitting India together as a nation. By translating Indian works in English, it is proved to the world that the colonizer is in no way superior to us because we too have a long history of great writing. From the ancient times, translation sees gradual changes. In ancient India, translation of a work was considered as ‘new writing’ and during colonialism, translation became a tool in the hands of colonizers to disseminate their imperialist ideologies. But in post-colonial era, the role of translation has been enhanced. It helps in projecting India’s image as a country with rich literature to the outside world.

**Index Terms:** Ancient, Colonial, Indian – literature, Post-Colonial, Translation.

## Research Paper:

Translation is a transference of meaning from the Source Language (SL) to the Target Language (TL). It is a process of replacing a text in one language by a text into another. Translation has been defined variously by several scholars. For instance, Theodore Savory defines translation as an ‘art’, and Eric Jacobson defines it as a ‘craft’, while Eugene Nida describe it as a ‘science’. According to Dr. Johnson translation involves the process of “change into another language, retaining the sense”.

The phrase ‘in the Indian Context’ is used in my paper to limit the boundaries of the discussion of this wider concept. The intention is only to identify, locate and set up various ‘tropes of translation’ within the Indian tradition. The purpose behind this is to reflect upon our own processes in our own languages. The process of translation in India is as old as the history of Indian languages. In the Western culture translation is consider as secondary activity and inferior to the original. But in Indian the matter is different. Sanskrit is considered as *Devbhasa* in India. Most of the gems of Indian literature are written in Sanskrit. The Indian literary tradition is full of translation from Sanskrit texts into Indian language. In ancient India, this was not considered as translation, but it was known as *Ruptantaran* (change in form). It was considered as a new writing. The Western idea of translation’s fidelity to the original was not considered in ancient India. Sri Aurobindo reinforces this point when he say “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 (Nandakumar).”

As Sujit Mukherjee has outlined the status of translation in Indian in the following words:

This can be demonstrated most easily in the career of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* in various Indian languages. The *Pampabharata* and the *Pandavavijaya*, for example, are complete and self-contained literary works, irrespective of their sources. But when literary historians tell us that Pampa ‘wrote’ the *Mahabharata* in Kannada or that Kashiram Das ‘wrote’ the same in Bangla, we are suddenly made aware that ‘writing’ in this context is not divorced from the act of original composition (Cygnus).

The practice of translation differs from period to period. In the pre – colonial period translation was considered a kind of ‘new writing’ but during the colonial period it was influenced by British ideologies. G. N. Devy clearly gives a picture in the following words:

In the Indian context literary translations can be divided into three types: (i) those interested in the preserving the ancient literary heritage, (ii) those interested in ‘Westernising’ Indian languages and literature, and (iii) those interested in the ‘nationalising’ literature in modern Indian languages. In correspondence with the different objectives of these three types their mode of operation differs”.

During the colonial period the English text were translated into regional language of India. Most of the British writer e.g. Shakespeare, Byron, Wordsworth, Shelley etc. were translated into Indian languages. The increasing familiarity of the Indian reader with the European literature is clearly indicated by the history of translation. In 1783 William Jones took his place on the bench of the Supreme Court in Calcutta and announced his motive of translating the Sanskrit texts. His translation of Kalidas’s *Sankuntala* and Manu’s *Dharmasastra* were motivated by the understanding of Indian laws and culture, because it was an urgent requirement for the Europeans. In their words, they want to ‘purify’ Indian culture and speak on its behalf. S. Bassnett and Harish Trivedi in their Introduction to *Post Colonial Translation* have pointed out that translation is a “part of an ongoing process of intercultural transfer. Moreover, translation is a highly manipulative activity that involves all kind of stages in that process of transfer across linguistic and cultural boundaries”.

In the post – Independence era (Postcolonial) the practice of translation has completely changed. Projecting an authentic image of India to the outside world became necessary and it was possible only through English translation of Indian literature. If English writers and their works were largely translated into Indian languages during the colonial period, in the post - colonial period, Indian writers and regional language texts are being translated into English to reach larger readers. India is a multilingual and multicultural country Indian literature is available in many regional languages like Telagu, Marathi, Bengali, Rajasthani, Punjabi etc. and it is only through translation that it can reach to the readers in India as well as to the outside world. If Tagore’s *Gitanjali* had not been translated into English and with an introduction by W. B. Yeats not submitted to Nobel Prize Awarding Committee, it would perhaps not be possible for Tagore to win Nobel Prize in 1913. The authentic and genuine social – cultural ethos of Indian writing is known to the world through the translation of different Indian languages. How can people of the world will be aware of the contribution of our Prem Chand, Nirala, Mahasweta Devi, Krishna Sobti, Sarat Chandra, Ashapura Devi, Amrita Pritam and so many others who have been written in different Indian language? The only answer is that it is possible only through English translation of their works, because English is the only language which is known and understandable on the large scale in the world. Some admirable efforts have been made by Katha, Srishti, Rupa and Oxford University Press in this direction. English has increasingly become a Global language and a significant ‘communicative activity’. Referring to the growing significance of translation, Octavio Paz in his “Translation of Literature and Letter” has mentioned that translation is “the principal means we have to understanding the world we live in”. Translation transports the masterpieces of one language (SL) into another language (TL). As J. C. Catford defines translation in his *A Linguistic Theory of Translation*: “Translation may be defined as follows: the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent material in another language”.

He further states:

Translation is an operation performed on language: a process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another. Clearly, then, any theory of translation must draw upon a theory of language – a general linguistic theory.”

In the changing circumstances, the role of a translator has become very important. Translation is re-writing of a text in Source Language into Target language without doing violence to the earlier. A translator is a reader, interpreter and writer – all in one. His task is more difficult than a creative writer because a writer thinks and write in one language but a translator has a tight rope walking between two languages. So it is necessary for a translator that he should have a feel of the language because translation is not only transcreation, but is also transposition of cultures. Translation is also very challenging process. To find full equivalence of SL word in another word in TL is not possible because language is to some extent culture oriented. The words like *Rasakrida*, *Abhimana*, *Lila* is very difficult to translate and find equivalent words in English because English language lacks the exoticness of Indian languages. The culture based words like uncle, aunt, brother-in-law, cousin has a lot of meanings in Indian languages. So, a translator's role become important in making a translated work more understandable and authentic. At personal level, a translator has to take many precautions. The foremost requirement of translation is to be unbiased, free from any likes and dislikes. A good work of translation is born only when a translator undergoes a 'trance' during the translation process. A translator's personality is always reflected and be a part of his translation.

### Conclusion:

Survey of Indian fiction shows that there are many classics such as Premchand's *Godan* and *Gaban*, U.R. Ananthamurthy's *Samskara*, Tagore's *Gitanjali*, Srilal Shukla's *Ragadarbari*, Jainendra's *Tyagapatra*, Mahasweta Devi's *Aranyan Adhikar* have gain more popularity and are accessible to more readers through their English translation. But it is also a fact that many more are yet to be translated into English and other languages of the world. A systematic and comprehensive effort is needed to translate the Indian literature (Bhasha literature) to make the world aware of the glorious aspect of our Indian literature. Since language is a powerful tool of decolonization and nation – building, translation can play a greater role in the resurrection of bruised national pride. Indian literature in so many regional language can be established through translation. It is with this spirit that the present paper has been prepared. The process of translation is very important and interesting for those who believe in the strength of the intellectual traditions of India.

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