

An Overview of Translations in Gujarat: The World to Gujarat and Gujarat to the World

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Abstract

The process of translation is as old as the language itself. In the west, the earliest reference to the translational activities goes back to as early as the third millennium BC. However, never before it was given its due credit and credential as it has been attributed around the world in the last and the first decades of 20th and 21st century respectively. India has not been an exception in this trend. Being a multilingual country, the process of translation has always been an inevitable part of the Indian societies. During the British rule, the translation was undertaken for fulfilling many imperial objectives. Needless to say that the translation was used to expose and counter those objectives as well. In the post-independence era, translation has been pursued for various objectives in all the walks of life throughout India. Gujarat, however, was pioneer in the endeavours of translation much before the independence, remained apathetic in the post-independence era. The present paper aims at exploring the trends of translation both from Gujarati into English and English into Gujarati, in general and literary translation in particular.

Keywords- *Translation Theory; Literary Translation; Historiography of Translation*

Introduction

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The process of translation is as old as the language itself. The process is put under various domains such as an “art,” a “craft,” or a “science”. In the west, the earliest reference to the translational activities goes back to as early as the third millennium BC: “The Babylon of Hammurabi’s day (2100 B.C.) was a polyglot city, and much of the official business of the empire was made possible by corps of scribes who translated edicts into various languages.” (Nida 11). The role of a translator, however, has been recognised under various contradictory categories from that of a ‘traitor’ or even ‘predator’ or ‘cannibal’ to that of a ‘transformer’, ‘bridge’ or ‘deliverer’.

However, never before it was given its due credit and credential as it has been attributed in the last and the first decades of 20th and 21st century respectively. The editors of the books of translation studies have seen the drastic increase among the contributors in the field within the revised editions of their books over a period of a decades or two. The translation studies have been recognized as an accepted subject and “books, journals and doctoral dissertations appear faster than one can read them all, and at the heart of most of the exciting new research are broad questions about ideology, ethics and culture.” (Kuhiwczak and Littau 14) Indeed, body of the work done on the translation studies has been enormous, however, there can be seen some major traits and shifts during the unprecedented development of the branch.

An over view – Translation in India

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In India, being a multilingual country, translation has always been a natural process among various languages. Sanskrit is the common source of all Indian languages, however, there can be seen great degrees of diversity among these homogeneous languages. Nevertheless, Sanskrit being their common source of origin, the translation among these languages is facilitated with the similar culture, society, and people. Further, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the great ancient Indian epics are also the common source of pan Indian civilisation and its literature. These two epics are not only found in almost all Indian languages but also in oral traditions e.g. in various tribal communities, they have their own versions of the epics. Hence, translation has been a very common practice among Indian languages.

On the other hand, the long practice of translating from Sanskrit into English is dating back to William Jones' *Sacoontala* published in 1789. The aspiration to create literature in English language is one of the distinctive aspects of Indian life bestowed by the British. Though it took some time for India to distinguish between the 'Indo-Anglian' and Indian writing made available in English translation. As Sujit Mukherjee avers that as late as 1960, Dorothy M. Spencer's introductory essay makes serious distinction between Indian novels written in English and Indian language novels translated into English. (Mukherjee 4) There can be seen two broad categories of translation in India viz. vertical translation and horizontal translation. The former stands for the translation of ancient Indian texts, almost always from Sanskrit language into English and the later stands for the translation of modern Indian texts into English. The reasons for translating the Indian texts and literature into English vary significantly from pre and post independent practices of translations. The pre-independent translation by Indian translators were limited to the individual translations of their own texts, Tagore's *Gitanjali* is one such celebrated example of this kind of translation, or the ancient religious texts into English. The post-independent translations on the other hand are diverse in nature and immense in quantity. According to Sujit Mukherjee the reasons for all Indian literary texts being translated into English are more assimilating: "...for many Indians today who read only in their mother tongue and in English – and sometimes not even in their mother tongue – such translations provide their first acquaintance with texts they would never otherwise know." (Mukherjee 6) There can be see a shift in the justification for the Indian literary texts being translated into English. For Gokak it was "a matter of great importance that Indian literature should be represented abroad by modern classics translated effectively into English." (Gokak 165) According to Sujit Mukherjee representation of Indian literature into English abroad is only incidental. Much larger justifications are available at home in India. The Nobel Prize to Tagore's *Gitanjali* in 1913 was earliest motivation for the authors and translators to venture into either writing their literature in English or at least to translate their work into English. However, the national awards such as Sahitya Akademi have played

a vital role in introducing a work and its author from one region of India to the other. Once a regional literary work is given such an award, a host of 'enterprising translators' and some 'venturesome publishers' for translating that work into English. Moreover, "*Sahitya Akademi itself has ventured to publish some UNESCO-Sponsored translations, such as The Puppets' Tale (1968; rept. 1978) and The Wild Bapu of Garambi (1969).*" (Mukherjee 14) Yet another thrust area that promotes the translation of Indian regional work into English is the Indian films, specially the ones that are awarded or at least the films that are critically acclaimed. The film version of Pather Panchali by Satyajit Ray raised the author of the novel Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay from the status of a minor author and also gained admittance for the book into the UNESCO translation programme. Merely the film adaptation of a work of art does not necessarily lead in increasing the readership for the work, however, being a recipient of a national award certainly creates a market for the book to come. (Mukherjee 11) Hence, India has been a fertile land for the field of translation owing to the aforesaid reasons.

An over view – Translation in Gujarat

Gujarati has been one of the oldest languages of Northern India. In its origin, it is older than English language. When the first known Gujarati work was written in 1165, England as a nation did not exist nor was English was developed to be called a language. Much before the first established English poet, Geoffrey Chaucer (1340? - 1400) began to write in England, Gujarati had plenty of poetries to offer: "*The period of old Gujarati, beginning from the twelfth century, has many long narrative poems by Jain saint poets...A plethora of poetic forms invented by Narsinh, Mira, Akho, Premchand and Dayaram make this period (the medieval period, i.e. 1450-1850) an extremely fertile one.*" (Kothari 72) By the end of 19th century, Gujarati has its first novel, Karan Ghelo (1866) by Nandashankar Mehta, the first social novel, Sasu Vahu ni Ladai (1866) by Mahipatram Dave and a full-fledged bulky novel, Saraswati Chandra (1898) by Goverdhanram Tripathi.

The first half 20th century shows an immense dominance of Gandhi in almost all the walks of life in India in general and Gujarat in particular. Be it social, political, educational or religious aspects of society, the influence and the presence of Gandhian thought can be seen; the literature of Gujarat is not an exception in it. All the major Gujarati authors including K. M. Munshi, Jhaverchand Meghani, Dhoomketu, Sundaram, Umashanker Joshi, Ishwar Petlikar and most other known or unknown were under influence of Gandhi. Most of these authors were not read beyond Gujarat or Gujarati readers nor translated into English or any other Indian languages, except M. K. Gandhi, K. M. Munshi and few others. On the other hand most of the literature or that which was best to read in India and around the world was made available into Gujarati. There were two major sources of this trend. The first was The Gujarat Vernacular Society established by A. K. Forbes, who was appointed as an assistant judge in Ahmadabad by the East India Company, with the assistance of the Gujarati poet Dalapatram. The

society mainly endeavoured to preserve the old Gujarati manuscripts and print them to foster the forum for publishing works written in Gujarati. Along with publishing old and original works in Gujarati, Forbes emphasised greatly upon translation with a view to 'improve' Gujarati language. As he avers:

"When we contribute to a Christian Mission we acknowledge the call. When we try to lift up the language of the province from its present ignoble condition and encourage the more gifted fancies among those to whom it is vernacular, to enlarge, refine and regulate it by manifold application, that it may become a filter to convey from mind to mind and from generation both the beautiful and the true, then too we acknowledge the same call to benefit those among whom for the present we are sojourners."(Parekh 11)

Thus Gujarat Vernacular Society had been one of the oldest sources of translation into Gujarati with a different kind of 'colonial transaction'. Even after one and a half century of its establishment, the society is still active, with its new avatar as Gujarat Vidya Sabha in publishing original works and translations into Gujarati. As Maria Tymoczko, one of the major practitioners of postcolonial translation theory, asserts that translation '*is powerful and it is not innocent*' (Tymoczko 1999: 18), there can be seen rush to translate from a language or a culture which is 'perceived as being rich and dominant'. As Rita Kothari notes that 'In the nineteenth century, English texts played the role of 'nurturing', and the 'native' target texts gained 'sustenance'.' (Kothari 74).

Another motivating influence to translate the best that was there in the world in general and English in particular into Gujarati came from Gandhi's views on translation: "*It would be good economy to set apart a class of students whose business would be to learn the best of what is to be learnt in the different languages of the world and give the translations in the vernacular.*" (Gandhi, 1938, 9).

Translation of Indian literary works into English has become a serious enterprise in and outside academia. Gujarati literature has its unique contribution in the said enterprise. Gujarati canonical novels such as *Manvini Bhavai*, *Karan Ghelo*, *Malela Jiv*, *Agaliyaat*, *Akoopar*, to name a few, are being translated and showcased along with main stream Indian writing in English. There has been a rise in the proposals of doctoral thesis for translating Gujarati literary works into English. Nevertheless, there is a scarcity of research related to the evaluative aspects of the translated texts keeping in mind the best practices of translation.

Conclusion:

Many of the translation of canonical Gujarati novels such as *Manavini Bhavai* (Endurance: A Droll Saga) by Pannalal Patel, *Angaliyat (The Stepchild)* by Joseph Macwan and *Akoopar (Akoopar – The Infinite)* by Dhruv Bhatt are translated over the period of last two decades. These novels are set in various regions of Gujarat and the language used in these novels represents various dialects of Gujarati

language. *Manavini Bhavai*, for instance depicts the plight of the farmers of Northern Gujarat during the famine of the first decade of 20th century. *Angaliyat* deals with the lives of Dalits of Charotar region of Gujarat. Whereas, *Akoopar* is set in and around the Gir forest and portrays the people, places and heritage of that region in *Kathiyavaadi* dialect. All these novels are translated into English by eminent translators. As these three novels have numerous dialectical features in them, it would be worth exploring the strategies employed for translating such dialectical features. Since a dialect is a regionally or socially distinctive variety of a language, it is identified by a particular set of words and phonological features. Spoken dialects are usually also associated with a distinctive pronunciation and accent. At times the two dialects of the same language become unintelligible to each other e.g. the dialects of Chinese: Mandarin, Cantonese etc. Cockney, one of the dialects of English, is considered 'squeamish' and 'affected' by the standard users of English. Similarly, a Gujarati dialect spoken in the Northern Gujarat is somewhat unintelligible to the people of Southern Gujarat. Now, while translating Gujarati novels with diverse varieties of dialectical features into English, what strategies of translation are employed by the translators could be an interesting study.

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