

## Editorial

### **Introduction: Traversing A Tough Terrain: Issues in Text and Translatability**

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Although statements may sound banal at times; they also make way for initiating an argument and making a point. I wish to do both and therefore let me begin by positing three points concerning text and translation. First, the history of text and translation is as old as human consciousness; second, all expressions human and animal are essentially the efforts at creating a text and assessing the ways of its translation; and third, sheer human necessity, irrespective of its magnitude, led to the birth of a text and the need for its translation.

To elaborate further on the issue of the text, I would argue that the text has been a basic material with the human beings, and enmeshed in their consciousness ever since they came into existence. Born in a physical image, human beings have expressed themselves through two modes: gesture and language and these two modes of expression, both separately and together, have constituted a text. This has continued ever since, and shall be so ever after.

Further, texts of various hues have emerged from the dual needs of the humankind: the need to broaden the frontiers of knowledge, and the need to establish communication with others. Human beings naturally desire knowledge, said Aristotle, and this desire to acquire knowledge got manifested in their psychological need to explore new areas of awareness, extend the limits of human relationship, and to communicate beyond the confines of the self.

This need to communicate beyond the confines of the self took men and women to discover their own imaginative contours of linguistic expression at the later stages of civilisational development. This resulted, ultimately, in the emergence of an organised text which did not concretize in quick succession of events but through a long drawn process of historical evolution. It was in this process of growth and development that a working lexicon acquired concreteness, which later gave birth to a language, the language to a grammar, and the grammar to a pattern of expression, and finally that pattern of expression, to a style.

\* The first part of the introduction is from the Keynote Address delivered by Prof. Anisur Rahman, Dept. of English, Jamia Milia Islamia, New Delhi, during the two

days National seminar on Linguistic and Literary Terrain of Translation organized by the Department of English, Salesian College, Sonada on 30-31 July 2010.

It amounts, therefore, to saying that text is a complex phenomenon as it has grown and concretized over a prolonged span of time, and that it has emerged as the sign of the people and their essential character. Thus, the huge baggage of texts so created by the geniuses of given languages, were bound to be as varied as the human needs themselves. In various lands with various conditions, these texts came to be created with numerous purposes like imparting knowledge, creating a political order, running a social structure, establishing a legal system, colonizing the people, moving a market, propagating religious faiths, spreading a healthy or a vicious propaganda, integrating or disintegrating the people, and so on. In a different parlance, texts of innumerable types came to be created which included secular and religious texts, social and political texts, cultural and philosophical texts, legal and administrative texts, scientific and technical texts, market and propaganda texts, and so on.

All these texts ultimately helped to identify a people and their major marks. Difficulties in the process of creating a text arose when human concerns multiplied and got intricate with the passage of time. A text was no longer the result of an individual's experience or apprehension; it became a serious critical and theoretical concern as it turned into a complex construct of disparate constituents. It reflected the growth of a language, as much as it represented the complicated thematic or ideological concerns of a people. It also got related with the progress of a culture, the preservation of knowledge, and cross-cultural communications. Thus, the text became an iconic mark, a certain measure of the growth and development of a social conglomeration or habitat.

A literary text turned, ultimately, to be a phenomenon of veritable significance, a complex construct of cultural significations, political connotations, and historical implications. This text acquired varying degrees of significance depending on the site from where it emerged. Cultures with a more unified pattern of history produced texts of lesser layers while the cultures with more complex patterns of history produced much more complicated texts to negotiate with. In the cases of the latter type, too diverse and too variegated texts came to be handed down. These texts were bound to evade a concrete and broader definition of their essential nature, as would be borne out by the case of the multilayered texts from a multilingual and multicultural site like India. The Indian text, I would submit, has tested and tried a translator more than any other text, especially when an effort was made to translate it in a non-Indian language. This text has evaded like an illusion more often, than it has lent its hand like a hospitable host.

I wish to add further that a text could not have been constituted unless it entered into a dialogue with its co-relates at diverse levels. This dialogue had to be established with the reader, as also with other languages and ages, authors and texts, canons and customs, forms and genres. It only attested that a text did not have a unitary life of its

own, and that it did not stand alone in isolation. It developed in a dialogic relationship and lived a life of rich collaborative nature with supplementary levels of sustenance.

As texts developed in the way they did, they could not be entirely original in their make up, their character, and cumulative appeal. Let me assert that texts sustain a culture, and as cultures do not sustain in isolation, the texts too do not live a unitary life. This amounts to an assertion that the texts that grow in shared communicative relationships in and beyond time, grow organically as texts of power representing an advanced cultural condition with greater authenticity. This text of power is characterized by its ability to wield influence in and outside the peripheries of its origin, create new canons, and seek new identities.

This takes me to another facet of the text which, for convenience, may be called a text in translation. Translation relates essentially with the major question of translatability which lies at the very core of all arguments about translation poetics.

Supported by a variety of arguments, one may confidently assert that all texts are eminently translatable, just in the same way as one may counter-assert that no text is truly translatable. A general survey of the issue would reveal that the two opposite views regarding translatability and untranslatability come from the linguistic and cultural approaches to the problem of translation. Linguists argue that no translation may be successfully undertaken because no two words, in two different languages, are ever the same in their meanings, in spite of all their approximation regarding their possible intent. It is so because the base units in two languages are incongruous and that there are no lexical or syntactical substitutes available to the translator which could help towards the re-configuration of a text in the target language. Those who would not agree with the linguists would posit that it is not the language that poses a barrier in translation but metalanguage, allusions, and sociolinguistic dialectics that make a translational negotiation difficult. They would also assert that experiences of a private and personal nature do not lend themselves easily to the translator. Since discussions on translation theory generally tend to be normative, translators look for optimal solutions and work out a strategy to enter this tough terrain of linguistic and literary translation. They depend largely on the functionality of language in its most liberal sense and exploit the same in the target language. They trust the referentiality of the source language text and work to create conceptual wholes which the reader in the target language may possibly relate with.

Given the complexity of translatability/untranslatability, one is naturally tempted to ask as to what constitutes translatability in actual terms and how can the parameters of translatability be authenticated in the act of translating? To find answers to these questions, we shall have to engage with the text and the author-the two prime sources-and examine the dynamics of textual creation which include the issues of historicity and metaphoricity, myth and mythopoeia, texture and structure, as also the very nature of the text in hand, and the language employed to re-create or re-configure that text in translation.

At the very basic level, translatability depends, as we are quite aware, on how well a translator may negotiate with the devices employed in the original text, and how best the figures of speech may be re-configured in a translated text. These basics, however, lead to more complicated issues like how the cultural specificity of a text may possibly be dealt with in yet another language of its own cultural make up, and how the ideological formations, enmeshed in the original text, may best be incorporated to sound plausible in the translated text. The intriguing individuality of the form is yet another issue to be taken into consideration as forms are, quite often, particularly suited to a language, and achieve their perfection only in the source text rather than the target text. The roots of the particularity of form in a given language go to the very genius of the language in which the text is originally created. In translation, the form is re-created and in the process, it is quite likely that the form acquires a different *avatar*.

With the issues raised so far, it would appear that translatability has to be the most important concern for the translator, and not the consideration that a text needs translation only because it is a major one and must, therefore, be translated in another language. It is worth arguing that the choice of text made by the translator must depend on the degree of translatability that the translator may possibly see in it. It depends on how the translator reads that text, and how the supposed reader may possibly approach the same text in translation. This issue is also related with yet another subsidiary issue that concerns the very purpose of translating a text. It has to be asserted here that no translation may be undertaken without an adequate examination of how far a text from one language would ultimately matter in another language. In other words, it needs to be assessed as to how a text from one language would confer with its counterpart in another language which may have its own codes of identity and its own marks of individuality.

As the text speaks differently to different readers, translatability also depends on the nature of the dialogic relationship the translator develops with the text. There is a multi-layered dialogue the author of the original text initiates while authoring a text. It includes his dialogue with the co-relates of the text like time, place, milieu, tradition, canon, and the very experiential and structural dynamics of the text intended to be translated. In the process of translating a critically chosen text, a translator re-lives the source text and re-creates the same in the target language for a different readership with the intention that the reader may possibly establish a level of congruence with the codes of experience and expression contained in the original text.

Yet another issue related with the issue of dialogicity of the text with the translator, is the issue of the translator's own reading, or possible interpretation of the text. It also entails whether any attempt at conceiving a meaning with any amount of finality is likely at all. As authorial intention is indeterminable because of the fact that the very nature of reality is indeterminable, all texts have to remain fluid and unfinished. Extending this logic further, it is worth asserting that as all texts have to remain fluid

and unfinished, all translations too have to remain tentative and partial in spite of the best efforts on the part of the translator to determine the extent of their translatability.

Just as the concept of the original text is a humbug, so is the concept of originality in translation. Since no text is a complete entity unto itself, no translation can ever be an absolute unit. My submission is that texts are essentially about the fluidity and fantasy of experience and expression, as much as the texts in translation are about the indeterminacy and mutability of the life and language as lived and contained in the original text. The creation of a text and its translatability are possible-impossible projects worth attempting and worth failing, worth failing and worth attempting.

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Language helps us to communicate but sometimes it also becomes a barrier in communication. In a country like India which is sometimes described as a 'mystery' in regard to languages the resultant problems are evident. Though Hindi is our national language each individual prefers his or her regional language, the fact being that one can express oneself better in the first language or mother tongue with few exceptions. Before we think of expressing our views it is important for us to understand the language itself. The influence of Western Education provided us with a kind of solution to this language-barrier problem with the introduction of the English language. English language being the currently preferred international language helps convey ones views to a larger audience and translation adds more colour to this process of expressing one's thought, imagination etc. Probably problems of language-barrier still persist when the works are translated from a vernacular into English despite its greater receptivity among the readers due to intricacies of thought, culture, history, myth, etc. of the Indic Civilization.

This issue of the journal is the direct outcome of the national seminar on 'Literary and Linguistic Terrain of Translation' organized by the Department of English, Salesian College Sonada in collaboration with PG department, Darjeeling Government College, Darjeeling, on 30-31 July 2010. The Seminar was an attempt to understand the value of Translation in general and into regional languages in particular in India and Darjeeling, highlighting the role of English language in uniting peoples and to gain insides into the vernacular literary assets of the region.

The first article by Ameena Kazi Ansari in 'Making a Case for Translation Studies in India' shows the multicultural diversity as providing rationale for the field of Translation studies. She also emphasizes that there is a need 'for developing a translation, historiography' and making Translation Studies compulsory in the higher education. Dipankar Sen taking the cue from Walter Benjamin's essay 'The Task of the Translator', argues that the translated text, 'cutting through linguistically constructed notions of differences', provide us with the 'fundamental cross-cultural, trans-national sameness'. Indranee Ghosh examines the role of intonation and stress in speech as

well as the sound of words in imparting meaning in the English translation of some poems by Joy Goswami (a popular Bengali poet). Amit Bhattacharya in his article 'It's all in the Speaking: The Dynamics of Intra-lingual Translation in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Tar Baby*' attempts to re-read two women's texts namely Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* and Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby*. He says that the case of intra-lingual translation may also be studied from an entirely different perspective - that of intra-lingual shift, i.e., translation within a language or between different codes or dialects.

Terence Mukhia shares his experience of translating some poems of Agamsingh Giri (Indian Nepali Poet). His "Translating Agamsingh Giri: Problems Re-Visited" talks about the problems faced before, during and after the translation. His motive for translation is to introduce Agamsingh Giri as an Indian Nepali poet to the non-Nepali speaking audience. Pius V. Thomas tries to frame the common space where translation and 'interculturality' establish a mutual contact in his "Writing as Translatability: The Intellectual Dynamics of Translatability". He also states that the current theoretical approaches to translation should highlight more important dimension of 'translatability'. Anil Joseph Pinto in "Reading More Intimately: An Interrogation of Translation Studies Through Self-Translation" focuses on the phenomenon of self-translation. He highlights the need to consider self-translation as translation by citing examples from Tagore's *Gitanjali*. Zinia Mitra acknowledges the existence of boundaries between cultures, talks about the awareness of boundaries by the translator and encountering difficulties in translation in "Translation: Politics and Problems." George Thadathil looks into the history of biblical translations and derives certain hermeneutical principles of interpretation that accompanies translation even in non-biblical secular literary enterprise. Tuhin Sanyal in "Translation: The Base and Superstructure" highlights different genres of translation. He focuses mainly on the Indian translators and examines the importance of culture in translation. In "Debt to the Soil: Dyson's Translation of Tagore's Poems", Sharmila Lahiri Maitra tries to show how Dyson translated Tagore's poems keeping in mind the subtle Indian nuances and has preserved the Indian essences. In his article 'The Role of Translation in Teaching English Literature'. Bishal Thapa suggests that it can be introduced as a creative method of learning and teaching in colleges and universities which can provide a new understanding of 'literary creativity'.

The next three articles though not the papers presented during the national seminar in English were added to make space for the writings on the thematic and explore translation as an activity in Darjeeling. In "Making an Art of Translation: A Case Study", Bedika Rai, presents a critical evaluation of the four poems of Agamsingh Giri' translated by Terence Mukhia. She highlights the importance of translation from Nepali into English, it establishes connections with and new understanding of a people in general. Nikesh Sapkota attempts a critical reading of Jiwan Namdung's (Sahitya Akademi Awardee) translated poems by Bhanu Chettri (Akademi Awardee for best Translation) in his "A Journey from Nepali to English: Namdung to Bhanu."

He assesses the attempt made by the translator to remain faithful to the thoughts of the Source text. Sunita Lama in her "Role of English Translation in Indian English Literature" opines that translation into English was initially a European enterprise and literature goes along with Ameena Kazi Ansari and Bishal Thapa in making a case for the growth of Indian Literature.

The last two articles stand out in this issue as they do not directly address the issue of translation, but help to frame the themes discuss. Sanchita Das in "Playing Language, Playing Fear in David Mamet's *The Cryptogram*" draws our attention to the slippery linguistic code used by adults in the presence of children. In his article 'The 'Christian Humanism' in *The Countess Cathleen* Roger Augustine shows that the play by W.B. Yeats has been built around the theme of Christian Humanism. These in a way address the broader perspectives in translation and interpretation referred to by George Thadathil and Amit Bhattacharya and the issue of translatability dealt by Pius V. Thomas and Anisur Rahaman in particular.

Reading these articles one can see the various ways of understanding the term 'translation'. Finally it is important to preserve in mind the necessity of having the adequate knowledge of languages for the translators to pass on the essence of the source text. Good translation despite difficulties faced in the process of translation transcends to a higher level of understanding language and its communicability and thus proves to be an art in itself.

**Terence Mukhia, Bedika Rai, Nikesh Sapkota and Priyanka Das**