

## Making A Case for Translation Studies in India

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### Abstract

Ansari seeks to address major concerns that pertain to Translation Studies, a significant area of academic engagement. She focuses specifically on the Indian context of this engagement, which is an issue that has not yet been attended to with the academic seriousness that it deserves. She lays emphasis on how we may possibly evolve a strategy for translation as well as Translation Studies that is rooted in indigenous realities.

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We live in a world of contraries but the common factor that unites these contraries is communication, communication of all manners and shade of language through which people express themselves. It is the word, in turn, that underlies language, and it is the accessibility of the word that builds the bridges of linguistic transmission across our world of contraries. And translation lies at the core of this transmission.

In the world of academia, translation is an interface between linguistics and literary studies. It produces an intercultural communication that meshes in discourse and culture. In doing so, translation establishes a relativity of time, place and reception by the target audience. A systematic study of the practice and pragmatics of translation encompasses the area of what is called Translation Studies or Translatology. This is an interdisciplinary field that straddles a whole spectrum of subject intersections that include literature and literary studies, linguistics, semiotics, philology, philosophy, history, anthropology and even computer science. As it borrows from the disparate fields of social sciences, humanities and the sciences, Translation Studies focuses on the definitions, theories, and applications of translation, analyzing and interpreting these activities.

Translation and Translation Studies or Translatology subsume an author, a text, a translator, and an audience/readership of translation. The interface of at least two languages is an essential ingredient of any translational enterprise. This interface involves nuanced transmutation of a text from one language into another. It has to be emphasised that this transmutation is dependent on the generic core content of the text being translated. While the translation of literary texts requires fidelity and creative transformation, the translation of business or scientific texts demands technical interpretation and elucidation.

## The European Beginnings

When one glances back at the history of translation and Translation Studies, it becomes very apparent that Europe has been a pioneer in this field. Given the specifics of its history, culture and location, the continent has always had a linguistic variety that called for translation since the medieval era. It is only natural, therefore, that European academia has addressed and negotiated with the theoretical basics that go into the practice and poetics of translational activity. Over the centuries, numerous voices, with their differing perceptions, have given expression to the problematics of translation. While some have sought to identify the ideal via media of translation, others have relied on communication theory to define the act of translation. Sometimes translation has been perceived as an act of creativity; at other times it is seen as a force of fragmentation. Translation theory sometimes foregrounds the centrality of canon, while at other times it strategises against it. Invariably, all opinions have juggled with and tried to establish and authenticate the linkage behind the vital cogs in the translational process, that is, the author of the original text, the original text itself, the translator of the original text, the translated text, and the reader of the translated text. And in this plethora of opinions there is one fact that emerges very clearly that is, translations/translators create meanings. So strategies may differ, nomenclatures might quibble, translation theorists may split hairs, publishers might engage in politics, but the bottom line is that translation is essentially a communication that attempts to contextualise in the broadest sense possible. It is a "literature" that is engendered in linguistic manipulation. It strikes a fine balance between "foreignisation" and "domestication" by "bending one language towards a foreign one".<sup>1</sup>

The richness of Europe's contribution to the sphere of translation and Translation Studies is matched by the richness that India offers as a literary site. This richness emanates from a nation that is multicultural, multilingual, historically vibrant and politically complex. When we glance at the past, we have to acknowledge India's awesome literary heritage; when we observe the present, we are impressed by the profusion of literary writing that has made its way into readership and canon. This literary treasure trove that we can justifiably be proud of is rooted, on one hand, in the multicultural ethos that has fed and groomed the creative imagination of our writers. On the other hand, India's rich linguistic diversity surfaces in the form of the many languages that our litterateurs have a choice of. The dynamics of its historical events and the complexities of its political arena have, in their own ways, enhanced the multicultural and multilingual resonances that abound in our literature. Put in a nutshell, we are a territorial entity of many languages, many literatures. In such a scenario it is stating the obvious to assert that translation has, and does play, an extremely significant role.

1 Mary Snell-Hornby, *The Turns of Translation Studies: New paradigms or shifting viewpoints*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2006, p.8.

Though it got an added impetus from the spiralling interest that English Studies in India have evoked, translation and Translation Studies in India have gravitated towards an imitation mode. This mode is marked by an inclination to rely on the practices, parameters and paradigms that are not essentially foreign. Not being home-grown, they do not meet the essential requirements of a practice and poetics of translation that is rooted in the rich literary site that is India. The need of the hour is to formulate the basics of a field of intellectual engagement that is overwhelmingly specific to a space, a place, time and context. The canonical parameters of translation and the allied field of Translation Studies need to be drawn up keeping in mind the literary creativity and profusion that marks our country as a literary site. While there have been voices calling for evolving our own prescriptive and descriptive standards in this area, one invariably finds that imported theories or practices are brought up when Indian academia engages with the problematics of this field. Given this scenario, it would be useful for us to make a beginning by examining the specific role and relevance of translation and Translation Studies in India. Such a beginning can be made by first identifying and then coming to grips with the conditions and sensitivities that shape India's literary creativity and also pave the way for translation in the country. We can no longer rely on importation; we have to tread our own path of indigenisation.

### **Discovering Indigeneity**

In this regard, we have to keep in mind certain constants that inform and influence all avenues of our translational enterprise. The first maxim for translation is that we accord primacy to the aim and purpose of translating within and for our own literary space. This maxim involves determining the needs and expectations of a reader/audience from the point of view of readers/audience's culture and milieu. The translator should attach more importance to reader/audience or the target culture rather than the writer/creator or the source culture. An Indian translator's endeavour would be fruitful if the needs and expectations of the reader/audience are met and this requires a fine balancing act in a literary scenario brimming with a linguistic and cultural diversity like ours.

Secondly, India is a space in which history and politics have played a very vital role in shaping the literary imagination. In addition to the information that flows from a historian's or a political scientist's pen, literary writing in India has produced works that capture the essence of that very same history and politics. A glance at the literary harvest of the past hundred years would bear this out, underlining the fact that literary works can often be perceived as a facet of historical or political documentation and testimony. The translational enterprise in India would be greatly enriched if those undertaking this task were familiar with the events and the ideologies that have shaped the nation state as well as the creative writer's perceptions.

Thirdly, a considerable segment of literary writing in the country is an offshoot of the colonial encounter. An abundant crop of multilingual and hybrid texts has ensued.

We would do well to keep in mind the fact that the specifics of such writing are unique and special to our space and time. We must, therefore, evolve an interface zone in which the practice and poetics of translation coalesce to underline and validate the specificities of a home-grown translational enterprise. This enterprise fuses the old and the new within the framework of the "Third Space"<sup>2</sup> which Indian academia needs to evolve and define.

Fourthly, we need to foreground the fact that the practice and theory of translation bring to centre-stage an area of comparative studies which is rare to find elsewhere in the world. This again is linked to India's unique position as a literary space revelling in linguistic diversity and rich cultural heritage. There is no doubt that diversity and heritage are catalysts that propel translation, but it is imperative that we critically examine and evaluate them as points of comparative reference in formulating our own parameters and paradigms of Translation Studies.

Fifthly, as a corollary of the four points mentioned above, we have to strive to create our own canon of translation in its practical and prescriptive fields. Canonical formulations, especially of the European kind, do exist but their very existence should inspire us as academics to formulate our own standards and theories in the light of the linguistic realities that mark our literary production and guide our critical thought and its formulation. Some of the lacunae that exist in the field of Translation Studies in India concern the profusion of translations without requisite standards for the choice of texts to be translated as also standards for the assessment of these translations. This situation underlines not only the lack of academic sustenance that is essential for upholding the entire exercise of translation and its theory, it also points to the lack of institutional support that is needed to make translation an authentic academic discipline entailing serious academic engagement. In the globalised scenario of today it becomes necessary to evolve our own parameters of translation theory and ensure that our theoretical formulations are rooted in indigenous soil of our linguistic diversity.

Sixthly, it has to be acknowledged that translation today carries equal importance in literary and as well as non-literary fields. In the ever-expanding world of science and technology, it is translation that bridges linguistic gaps. As a result, the vast scope and impact of translation can be perceived the world over. We need to theorise along lines that cater to the Indian context. As we look at translation in the times of postcoloniality and after, it becomes clear that we must ask ourselves four core questions. They are: i) Why translate? ii) Who/what to translate? iii) For whom to translate? iv) How to translate?<sup>3</sup>

The future lies in addressing these questions from our viewpoint and our requirements. The answers may vary from language to language, region to region,

2 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London and New York, Routledge, 1994, p. 36.

3 These four issues are discussed in Anisur Rahman's article "On Translating Modern Urdu Poetry" in *Indian Literature*, Vol.XLII (May-June 1998), No. 185, 163-176.

translator to translator, publisher to publisher, and institution to institution. But the lowest common factor that binds these questions together is the translator. He/she transits from source text reader to target text author, undertaking to establish intra-textual coherence between source and target text.

### **Contemporary Concerns**

In today's world we have to take cognisance of the new areas of translational activity. Major new areas of translation that demand attention are: i) Empirical translations that arise out of technological advancement; ii) translations propelled by globalisation, which sees the world as an international marketplace; iii) translations emanating from socio-political dynamics like the rise of democracy, new national identities, the demise of communism, and the re-discovery of cultural heritage and ethnicity; iv) translations rooted in lingua franca compulsions that underline the co-existence of English (as the colonial legacy) and an official language (adopted as a counter to the colonial legacy of language).<sup>4</sup>

It is also incumbent on us to evolve a mechanism of maintaining databases of translators in these multiple fields so that a suitable register and idiom can be evolved to meet the requirements. Language exclusivities, especially anglophile superiority, have to be consciously erased so as to foster a kind of linguistic democracy that equally enfolds all languages. The equity of languages and their transference from one to the other has to be inculcated by making translation and Translation Studies a compulsory component of our higher education syllabi.

At the end, one must reiterate that being a multicultural and multilingual site, India presents a far greater variety of issues that concern Translation Studies than most other such sites. The time is now ripe for us to evolve and strategise our own practices, paradigms and postulations in this particular field of academic and technical engagement. There is need for developing a translation historiography and history that grows out of our space and identity. And for us to achieve a measure of success in this regard, it is necessary to formulate our own canon of translation that is rooted in the realities of our literary, historical and socio-cultural milieu.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*