

## Making an Art of Translation: A Case Study

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### Abstract

Rai presents a critical evaluation of four of the translated poems by Terence Mukhia in the monograph Agamsingh Giri published by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. She highlights the importance of translation and states that it had to wait till post-colonial time to be a distinct literary genre. She shows how the translation is a fit medium through which sharing takes place helping different peoples to unite.

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Indian languages became the interest of the British as it was essential to carry out their administrative works. Nathaniel Brassey Halhed opines that English language was introduced in India to cultivate a medium to bridge the gap between the rulers and the ruled. Western education along with the English language was introduced in India with the aim, as we read in Macaulay's 'Minute on Education': "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect".<sup>1</sup> Indian literatures in English took the language far beyond its prior aim. Colonial education can be marked as an important phase for the growth of Indian literature worldwide. Yet, there arises many questions regarding writing in English, when we know that even the best of Indian writing does not receive desired recognition in the history of English literature. English language started to become one of the Indian languages. Many works were translated into English. The works of, to say, O. V. Viyayan (Malayalam novelist) and Girish Karnad (Kannada playwright) are translated in more than one language. Many Indian writers are bilingual. Arshia Sattar in 'Translation into English' writes that the history of translation of Indian literature into English can be divided into three important periods, namely, early Orientalism, the Indian Awakening and the Post-Independence enterprise. Indian writing in English had to wait for post-colonial times to be a significant genre in literature 'under conditions of intensified globalisation'.<sup>2</sup>

Postcolonial criticism rejects universalism. The beginning of postcolonial criticism can be traced to Frantz Fanon's "The Wretched of the Earth". Fanon has argued that finding a voice and an identity by the colonised people is to "reclaim their own past".<sup>3</sup>

1 Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, *A Concise History of Indian Literature in English*, London, University Press, 2003, p.5.

2 *Ibid.* p.23.

3 Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory*, New Delhi, Viva Books Private Limited & Manchester United Press, 2002, p. 193.

Edward Said's "Orientalism" (1978) throws more light into the European Cultural tradition of calling east as "Other" the orient. The postcolonial movement in writing has given a special place to translation by making it an art. Oxford dictionary defines translation as a means to express in another language or in a simpler word. It has become a different genre of writing in literature. We see many translations from one language to another; a special attempt has been made to give equal significance to one's native language, history, tradition, culture, custom, myth, literature etc. There is a difference between translation and transliteration. Transliteration is to represent in corresponding characters of another alphabet or language, whereas to translate, is another creation at all-keeping its originality by changing language. This change of language to express the same feeling, to create the same ambience - brings different taste to the same concept.

Many texts were written and are being translated from the time immemorial, only the medium varies. Oral literature was translated into written literature. Prior to this, we find pictures drawn on the walls of caves giving abstract oral ideas a concrete shape. Tagore's 'Gitanjali' has been translated into different languages. We used to read O.Henry's 'The Last Leaf' and "The Gift of Magi" translated in Nepali language. Bertolt Brecht's 'Mother Courage and Her Children', Samuel Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot' are all the creations of translation. Indian epics Ramayana and Mahabharata are also being translated into many other Indian languages as well as into English. In a similar way we see the attempt to introduce various Indian literatures to the world through translation. One such attempt is made by the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi.

### **Background to Sahitya Akademi Project**

By the early 1950's, the government funded Sahitya Akademi, (the National Academy of Letters). India's National Academy of letters is an organization dedicated to the promotion of literature in the languages of India. It was found on 12 March 1954. It worked in commissioning and publishing translations of India's regional literatures into other Indian languages and into English too. The Sahitya Akademi's Indian Literature(1957) is full time publishing translations. Translations also emphasise linguistic and cultural differences. Series of "Makers of Indian Literature" has been helpful to the interested readers in India and outside to understand not only one's language, literature, culture, custom etc. but also to understand and respect that of others'. The Sahitya Akademi organizes national and regional workshops and seminars and also publishes books and journals. We also find Sahitya Akademi Library which is one of the largest multi-lingual libraries in India.

My interest here would be to look at Terence Mukhia's translation of Agamsingh Giri's poems into English, which is a part of Sahitya Akademi's 'Makers of Indian Literature'. Giri's works constitute Indian Nepali Literature and Mukhia's translations add more colour to our literature. It is interesting to see the development of vernacular literature and everywork being a contribution in the making of Indian Nepali Literature.

## Agamsingh Giri

Agamsingh Giri was born on 29 Dec. 1927, in Chandmari, Darjeeling. He was a true Nepali in speech, culture, and life-style. He was a poet who represented the Indian Nepalese in the Indian Nepali Literature. He wrote of sadness and called his poems 'painful expression'. Giri has used various chandas as well as free verse in his poems. Giri was influenced not only by the Nepali literary figures but also by the Hindi and Bengali poets and writers like Rabindranath Tagore. We also come to know that he was interested in the English Romantic poets like Shelley, Keats and Wordsworth. This has a direct influence on Giri. Like Wordsworth, Giri has maintained simplicity of diction and reflects the 'humble and rustic life' of the Indian Nepalese. He was disturbed to see the bad political situation, low standard of living of the Indian Nepalese. Political condition of the then Indian Nepalese in India was one of the major subjects in Giri's poems. He was upset to see and to know the problems, sufferings both social and political. He was highly influenced by the then political scenario. His poems have the element of pain, sorrow and sufferings. We also find in his poems love for one's custom, language and devotion toward one's culture. He was posthumously awarded Bhanubhakta Puraskar for his anthology '*Jaleko Pratibimba: Royeko Pratidhawani*'.<sup>4</sup> Agamsingh Giri died on 31 January 1971, at the age of thirty-four.

He left behind a valuable art that reflects us now and then. His works bear not only educational value but are influential too in social, economic and cultural field. Giri's poems are included in the academic syllabus. Simplicity, romanticism, Nepali spirit can be found in his poems. He was and remains to be an asset to the Indian Nepali society.

## Terence Mukhia

Terence Mukhia was born on 6 Jan. 1975, in Maria Busty, Kalimpong. He is the Campus In-Charge and Professor of Philosophy and English in Salesian College Sonada. His interest in literature is immense and his contribution to it is remarkable. Sahitya Akademi, finding in him the capability to translate, requested Terence Mukhia to translate Giri's poems into English. Mukhia has tried to remain 'faithful' to the author but there are few places where Mukhia's invention of techniques to suit his purpose does not bear the evidence of his faithfulness. We find Mukhia's aim in translating Giri's poem to be twofold. He writes in the Acknowledgement in *Agamsingh Giri*, the aim was 'firstly, to introduce Agamsingh Giri in a simple way to the readers those who wish to know something about this Nepali poet of Darjeeling, India; secondly, to arouse interest of people in the works of this Indian Nepali poet.' Selected poems of Giri are translated those bearing the issue of identity of the Indian Nepalese. Mukhia calls Giri 'a great Indian Nepali Poet' and a 'modern romantic poet'<sup>5</sup> the fact, which

4 Agamsingh Giri, *Jaleko Pratibimba: Royeko Pratidhawani*, Kolkata, Naya Nepali Path Sankalan Press, 2005, p. 154.

5 Terence Mukhia, *Agamsingh Giri*, New Delhi, Sahitya Akademi, 2010, pp. 107-108.

cannot be denied. In translating Giri's poems he encountered many difficulties and discovered the genius of the poet.

We shall focus mainly on Mukhia's translations of Giri's four poems, namely, 'Victory to the Gorkhas', 'Guest Not for Long', 'Dawn of Existence' and 'Million Stars'. Out of many other translations of Giri's poems, these four chosen are more related with the present Indian Nepalese.

### **'Victory to the Gorkhas' (1946)**

Gorkhako Jai Hos has been translated by Terence Mukhia entitled 'Victory to the Gorkhas'. The poem creates the mood of celebration for the victory which has not been achieved but will surely be achieved with strong determination and a zest to succeed. The lines throw the idea of action. There is a movement in the poem for the movement to succeed. This effect can be found in both the source text and the target text.

The poem is of fourteen lines, but our translator has not formatted these lines into stanza form. '*Gorkha Ko Jai Hos*' is a poem of four stanzas, first, second and fourth stanzas are of four lines each. The third stanza consists only of two lines. Another important thing to look at is the rhyme scheme. Giri has written this verse ending in rhyme (aa,bb...) which we do not find in Mukhia's translation: "We have dared to do something/ We will not let down the Gorkha Flag".

Subject matter remains the same with the same pride for the Gorkhas and an aspiration to do something: "We are Gorkhas and we will not forget 'Victory to the Gorkhas' " ("*Gorkha naihow tah 'Jai Gorkha' lai bhuldainau*")

The fight for one's (Nepalese) identity can be felt in Mukhia's translation of Giri's this verse. The fearlessness quality of the Gorkhas is vividly pictured: "We will not retreat even if we need to die/ Whom shall we fear if we have to die".

Gorkhas are known for their courage and bravery which is evident in the lines: "If somebody comes to kill us we will offer our heads/ We will sacrifice our lives for the Nepalese."

In the last two lines of the poem Giri requests his friends to leave everything behind and to move ahead only for the cause of the Gorkhas: "*Sathi bhai biniti mero yo tah sunideu/Aruharu chadi aba 'jai Gorkha' lai leu*".

Giri has used the term 'biniti' which when translated into English becomes 'request' or to make a 'plea'. Terence Mukhia writes: "My friends, to this plea of mine lend me your ears/ Set aside everything and follow 'Victory to the Gorkhas'".

Giri entered the literary scenario as a 'revolutionary poet'. Sharing the same socio-political history Mukhia has been able to create the same zest for the Gorkhas. We

can also find the struggle and readiness to do anything for the identity of the Indian Nepalese in 'Dawn of Existence'.

### 'Guest Not for Long' (1959)

Interesting thing to look at, here, is the translated form of its title. The Nepali title of this verse is 'Atithi Hoina' the literal translation of which would be 'Not a Guest'. But this title 'Not a Guest' does not fit with the subject matter of the poem. Hence, Mukhia realizing the difference clarifies his idea of choosing 'Guest Not for Long' as the apt title for 'Atithi Hoina'. He says: "The literal translation will be 'Not a Guest', but taking the concept of the poetic song I have translated it as 'Guest Not for Long'.<sup>6</sup> This can be an example of a difference between translation and transliteration.

The poem is of three stanzas, consisting of four lines each. The word 'two' (numerical two) has become 'few' in its translated form. Giri writes: "*Atithi hoina dherai din ko/ bas cha kewal duye dinko*".

Mukhia writes: "I am a guest not for long/ My dwelling is just for few days".

This can be cited as another point to show the meaning of translation. Giri's poem has a rhyming quality which is absent in Mukhia's translation. Therefore, the verse in Nepali language gives more pleasure in reading than in its translated verse. Many times question arises with regard to the loss of quality of a work when translated. We shall discuss these questions and discover suitable answers later in this article.

To add more about the poem, it talks about the philosophy of life. Life, an odyssey, is transient and with it everything is transient. Mukhia can well describe this philosophy of life, himself being a student and teacher of Philosophy. This verse is marked with simplicity like that of Wordsworth's 'Lucy Poems'. Giri used simple dictions which are also followed by the translator: "The bond of love of this world/ And charity is just for few days." It is short, simple but has serious thoughts in it.

### 'Dawn of Existence' (1971)

According to the Cappeller Sanskrit English Dictionary '*Astitva*' comes from the root word *asti* which means to be, to exist. The suffix *itva* is similar to 'ness' giving the word *astitva* a wide range of meanings. Agamsingh Giri repeats the term *astitva* in the second and last lines of the verse, talking about the problem of existence and about a determination to find one's identity respectively. Identity moves on a higher scale and becomes an 'existence' issue in this poem. For Giri the most important problem faced by the Indian Nepalese is not identity issue but existence issue. If our existence is not felt then to fight for one's identity becomes futile. This problem faced by the Indian Nepalese has been defined in a picturesque way, "There is laughter but sadness is

6 *Ibid.*, p. 73.

deeply rooted"; we get the picture of the one who has learned to digest the sufferings. At the same time we also get to see the depth of sadness that has filled one's life.

*Astitva Udbodhan* is a poem of sixteen lines and each lines rhyme. However, the sixth stanza of 'Dawn of Existence' does not rhyme: "Come with this new age bringing dazzling flame / I shall wait for you plucking the stars of new firmament".

However, there is a hope in the speaker's voice when he says: "I shall wait for you plucking the stars of new firmament".

The more we read this line the more we understand the term 'existence' because the poet and our translator give us the sense of belongingness. Giri has mentioned a place to wait for a new beginning of one's existence, which is not mentioned in its translated verse. Nevertheless the poem maintains the spirit of existence and its absence in both Giri's poem and in Terence's translation of it.

### **'Million Stars' (1961)**

Giri's '*Naw lakh Tara*' is a poetic song telling the story of Nepalese living outside their country. The title of this poem '*Naw lakh Tara*' itself speaks a lot. The suffering is immense and the line correctly states, 'Look at our eyes without tears' not because of happiness but because none seems to understand the pain within. Though the blood is same in everybody the pain that the body suffers differ, "We have the same blood but sorrows are different" (*Mutu ko ragat eutai ho pir ko baha beglai cha*). And though the Nepalese throughout the world are known for their bravery, they have their own sufferings which they will share only "inside the cage".

Looking into the translator's invention in his translation we find many of them. Each end word of '*Naw lakh Tara*' rhymes unlike its translated verse, '*Million Stars*'. We find an epigram: "Happiness is apparent with sorrow within". Giri has used various *chandas*, whereas Mukhia has not followed any prosodic meter to suit the purpose of translation. Therefore, we find irregular line length: "There is no reason to be happy when there are no flowers among thorns."

The second line of '*Million Stars*' appears to be word to word translation, "It is autumn in the forest the flowers make bond of love" which can be simply written as "In the autumn the flowers make bond of love". Giri ends his thoughts in two lines which have been elongated in its translation. But we also find excellent lines in Mukhia's translation, such as, "Why did you nip the hilly flower at bud". He paints a beautiful picture of brutally nipping the bud. Another such line is: "The cry of the weak does not move the brave heart".

Considering only these four translated poems of Giri, we find them to be more prosaic than poetic; some such lines are: "If somebody comes to kill us we will offer our heads." (Victory to the Gorkhas), "Listen to the naked noise and don't simply get disturbed and scream" (Dawn of Existence).

Given the difficulties one faces during the translation we can understand the few changes made by Mukhia in his attempt to make an art out of the task of translation.

### On Translator and Translation

In the process of translation the translator ought to invent new techniques. This raises questions on the authenticity of the original work and on the significance of the writer, from two angles. Firstly, "[and that]; 'Like fungus in crevices, writers can flourish between literatures (and between nations); they can, as well, disappear without a trace between them',<sup>7</sup> there is an indication of the creative space as also a dangerous zone".

Secondly, as Gandhi hinted in *Hind Swaraj* said: "[T]o give millions knowledge of English is to enslave them. The foundation that Macaulay laid of education has enslaved us", points an inherent lack of creativity that hinders us in the process of emulating and wanting to recover the status of civilization.

The above statement besides is doubled aged in today's context where the English language provides freedom to express within but also to peoples outside. The function of English language has transcended Macaulay's understanding of it and has opened to higher levels of universal expression and critique.

By way of assessing the comparative significance of the original works and their translations, the translator was interviewed. To the question whether translation is an imitation or not, Mukhia opined that it is more a matter of being 'faithful' to the author. Changes take place in the process of translation because 'translation is a work of interpretation'.<sup>8</sup> English language though not of the Indian origin, yet, has acquired universal as well as indigenous status. Ordinary languages are forced to confine within limited boundaries as for example Nepali language circumscribed by the geographical and diasporic realities. The purpose of translating into English is to share and introduce one's native culture, literature, history, custom and language to the audience worldwide. Therefore, while translating the translator must remain 'faithful' to the author. When interrogated about the development of Indian Nepali Literature, he said that it is vast and requires to be brought to the main stream perception. In Indian Nepali literature, translation as a genre is still a slow development. It will surely take time to be part of the Indian literature due to its different political, geographical history. He further says that translation is not the outcome of globalization. It existed before the time of globalization and he cites Nepali Adikavi, *Bhanu Bhakt Acharya's* translation of '*Ramayana*' from Sanskrit into Nepali as an example.

Translation had to wait for postcolonial time to be a proper literary genre. According to Mukhia as for Nepali it found its real impetus after 70s and 80s. With regard to the role of translator, he says that one must be 'flexible' and 'innovative' and at the same

7 Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, *A Concise History of Indian Literature in English*, London University Press, 2009, p.21

8 Interview with Terence Mukhia, Salesian College, Sonada, on 9 February, 2012.

time must maintain the essence of the source text. The translator must be master in more than one language, because "language is a great barrier" in expressing one's thoughts as there lies "geographical and cultural background behind every language".<sup>9</sup> Translating the Source text into the Target text does not and should not destroy the beauty and significance of the Source text. It solely depends upon the translator to maintain the essence of the text A and also at the same time to create or invent suitable forms or techniques for the text B. Mukhia encountered difficulties in the translation work and one such was in choosing a proper title for Giri's poem *Naw lakh Tara*. His first title was the literal translation 'Nine lakh Stars'. His second choice was 'Numerous Stars' but this in English becomes 'Uncountable Stars'. Finally he decides and sticks to 'Million Stars', which can be taken as an appropriate title. He chuckles and says, "There is never ending difficulties in translation".<sup>10</sup> Socio-political differences add more to the significance of the language. Every literature shares its own socio-political and religious-cultural background too. Terence Mukhia rightly says: "If politics divides, literature unites".<sup>11</sup> Therefore, translation, an art, breaks the language barrier and helps to unite people in general.

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.*