

III BA ENGLISH
BEN54 — Indian Literatures in English Translation
study material
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Unit I

MODULE 1

Survey of the History, Growth, and Role of Translation in India

Introduction

India has 5 language families, 14 major writing systems, 400 spoken languages, and 1000s of dialects.

We live in a world of continuous communication in different languages—from manuals that accompany gadgets to medicines, and bestsellers. All this is made possible only through the act of translation. Translation is the natural extension of anything verbal and valuable we wish to communicate and it crosses three bridges—personal, linguistic, and cultural.

All intellectual transfers from ancient to the present time depend on people who can move words, sentences, images, and themes from one language world to another. In a multi-lingual society like India, translation is important because it is a form of promoting national understanding of the different regional 'selves' in the country. Through literatures in translation, the development of a certain shared social vision is possible. Translation is necessary for the emotional unshackling and well-being of our country.

Oral translation in Ancient India

India has a strong and vibrant oral culture. Music and literature were in the form of songs and poems which moved from one language/region to another, informally and easily. They were modified and enlarged according to the narrator's wish. That is why there are so many versions of the *Bhagavata* stories and retellings of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The *Kathasaritsagar*, the *Jataka* and *Hitopadesa* are also narratives that inspired the spread of hybrid stories. The clever wife, the foolish priest, and the greedy merchant are figures that appear in the lore of every region. This process of oral translation and transmission has always been our tradition.

Arabic and Persian in Medieval India

The Turks who established the Delhi Sultanate in the early thirteenth century introduced Arabic and Persian. India 'nativized' both and produced a hybrid language from it, namely Urdu. Thanks to the Arab traders on the Konkan coast and Malabar, there were brands of Tamilized

Arabic and mixes of Malayalam and Tulu with Arabic, in South India, long before the thirteenth century.

The Mughals' Contribution to Translation

Under the Mughals, Persian became the court language. The Mughal emperor Akbar set up a translation bureau in India in the sixteenth century. He was genuinely interested in making Indian thought available in Persian. His goal was to promote harmony between the two major religious systems of the day through translation. The first translation of the *Ramayana* came from a Maulvi named Badayuni (1580). Akbar also arranged for the *Mahabharata*, the *Yoga Vasistha*, the *Harivamsa*, and the *Bhagavata* to be translated into Persian. So it was through Persian that the West first became acquainted with the language and sacred literature of the Hindus. His great-grandson Dara Shikoh went on to translate some major *Upanishads*. The wisdom of the East was made available through translations prepared by a Mughal prince.

European Traders and Translation

Persian was the only language the Europeans studied in India. It was because they had to conduct trade with Mughal outposts. The role of people who knew two languages became critical. Such a person was known as a *d'wibhashi* that is, a speaker of two languages.

Translation and Governance

Early British Translations

For the first hundred years, translations of Indian texts into English were prepared by Englishmen in collaboration with Indians. British scholars urged their government to discover, collect, and translate information about the land the East India Company was controlling. The Governor-General Warren Hastings (in office from 1772 to 1785) felt that Hindus should be governed by Hindu laws. He had the lawbooks (*dharmashastras*) translated from Sanskrit into Persian by Indians.

Then Englishmen translated the Persian versions into English. The final texts in English translation were thus products of Sanskrit sources, mediated by Persian. They were very difficult to appreciate and understand since three languages are involved in the process. The first translation brought into being in this fashion using a 'broker-language' (Persian) between Sanskrit and English, was a legal text *originally titled Vivadarnavasetu*, which appeared under the name *A Code of the Gentoo Laws* (1776) translated by Nathaniel Halhed. The first complete translation of an Indian work into English was the *Bhagavad Gita* by Charles Wilkins. The year was 1784 and the publisher was the Asiatic Society of Bengal.

Thus, the British administrators translated Indian books into English but side by side they brought English language education into India. Slowly, English grew more important than the other languages.

The Bible in Indian Languages

Probably the most linguistically influential translations have been those of the Bible which were religious in purpose and literary in practice. Missionary activities and translations of the Bible into different Indian languages led to the preparation of dictionaries and the establishment of printing presses. Missionaries made a study of Indian culture, philosophy and languages in order to develop methods to preach the Gospels. Some of the most important missionaries dedicated to this purpose were Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656) an Italian, Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg (1682-1719) a German Protestant, and Heinrich Roth (1620-68) who developed the first Sanskrit grammar in Latin in the seventeenth century. All of this was transferred into English. The first Western-style dictionary in Kannada was developed by William Carey in 1817, a Serampore missionary and a polyglot. With these tools came the spread of journals, magazines, and newspapers in local languages. These developments led to the growth of print-media and book production. More and more people became literate. This generated a middle-class readership that wanted to read something other than stories and poems about gods and goddesses; they wanted to read about people like themselves. So forms and models found in English literature were quickly adapted by Indian writers during the nineteenth century. In this manner, English, a language that had no geographical base in India, became one of the mediums of our intellectual exchanges and the means of communication with the outside world.

Translation and Modern India

Colonial education brought with it the establishment of English literature in India, and great importance was accorded to English studies. This led to another irreversible reality: from the times of Raja Rammohan Roy, well into the twentieth century, Anglicization was viewed as an achievement, and a knowledge of English was equated with progress and modernization.

Cultural Domination of English in India

The most important face of British superiority in India was the English language, which established its hold over India's cultural world. English literature was not taught as a university subject even in Britain till the late nineteenth century, but was promoted as the symbol of civilization for the Indian colony; its study was institutionalized in India (by 1860 one could get a BA Hons in English from Calcutta University) before it was in England (Oxford University, 1894). When the British introduced English in Indian schools and colleges, they had an imperial plan. They believed that when someone studied English literature he or she would not be able to help admiring that body of work and would, as a natural extension of this, become admirers of British culture. They were right. For 200 years, Indian languages, literature, and art forms are yet to recover from English domination. Many generations of Indians genuinely believed that Indian literature and culture had nothing to match the scale, delicacy, or greatness of things British.

Importance of English Translation from Indian Languages

English is not even among the first fifty languages in terms of number of speakers.

Yet we study many literary and non-literary works only in their English translation. India is divided into states that were demarcated on the basis of the predominant languages in those regions. The fact is that we live on literary and language islands. Just because most of us feel safe in this island culture does not make it any healthier. We need to reach out of our regional boundaries and access the literatures and knowledge in other parts of India. Of all the languages we use, English is the medium of the widest literary exchange among Indians, and it offers an all-India participation on a scale that no other language can match.

What is IWE and What is ILET?

There is a difference between Indian writings in English (**IWE**) and Indian Literatures in English Translation (**ILET**). The Indian writers in English write for readers whose mental picture-galleries hold only those words that describe, match, and link up Indian experiences in English without hitting speed breakers. But Indian writing in English is so attractive to those readers outside India who cannot read our languages but yearn for the exotic and layered flavours of the material aspects of our country. They are under a powerful illusion that these Indian flavours are reaching them in English.

Translation and institutions

The systematic identification, translation and publication of regional writing into English and other Indian languages was first undertaken by the government sponsored Sahitya Akademis in the 1950s and 60s. The National Book Trust (NBT) also has a strong translation programme. The Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) conducts research in Indian languages and dialects, and prepares documentaries on the multi-lingual aspects of India and Indian writers. In 2008, under the Ministry of Human Resource Development, the National Translation Mission (NTM) was set up with its aim of networking and promoting a knowledge society. The Commission plans to translate texts from 70 subjects into 22 languages. The Bhasha Research Institute in Baroda was set up to promote the life, arts and welfare of tribal India.

Conclusion

Though our society is industrializing rapidly, most of the communications are carried on bilingually. Contracts, legal discussions, trade agreements are all done in two languages besides announcements in railway stations, bus terminuses and airports. Besides, literary works, films, television shows and all knowledge related works get translated into multiple Indian languages, especially from and into English. From oral literatures up to the present, translation has played a vital role in India. Translation from and into English has become the key for India's holistic development.

Translation Timeline

- (i) For thousands of years before Christ, India was the continuous recipient of foreign influences. All these impacted our languages in different ways. The earliest literary texts in the recorded history of India are in Tamil. Second comes Sanskrit, the language of migrating populations who came to India from somewhere in central Asia. While Sanskrit gradually became the language of Vedic philosophy and religious compositions, numerous regional traditions of folk-literature in languages that are not Sanskrit-based also existed simultaneously. Buddhist and Jain literatures were also composed in non-Sanskritic languages. This was roughly fifth-tenth centuries BC.
- (ii) The conquering Turks established the Delhi Sultanate in the early thirteenth century on the plains of North India. They brought a new era of political domination, but enriched the region culturally when they introduced Arabic and Persian. India 'nativized' both and produced a hybrid language from it, namely Urdu. The Arab traders on the Konkan Malabar, and East coasts resulted in Tamilized Arabic and mixes of Malayalam and Tulu with Arabic, in South India.
- (iii) Meanwhile, regional languages grew. Between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries, many languages like Bengali, Oriya, Assamese, Hindi, Kashmiri, Gujarati, Marathi, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam developed rich traditions in oral and written literature. Tamil continued to lead in sophistry and poetics of a very advanced order.
- (iv) The British arrived in the seventeenth century to trade exactly like the Portuguese and French. By the mid-nineteenth century, Britain's colonial empire established the supremacy of the English language. Universities and schools imposed a pattern of learning based on English and western system of knowledge. The demand for education in English came from social reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy who campaigned for it as part of his larger project of modernizing Indian society.
- (v) Missionary activity and translations of the Bible into Indian languages led to the preparation of dictionaries and the establishment of printing presses. With these tools came the spread of journals, magazines, and newspapers in local languages. This generated a middle-class readership that wanted to read something other than stories and poems about gods and goddesses; they wanted to read about people like themselves. So forms and models found in English literature were quickly adapted by Indian writers during the nineteenth century. In this manner, English became the primary medium of our intellectual discourse and means of communication with the outside world.
- (vi) Translation of Indian literature into English is only a little older than Indian writing in English. While literatures written in Indian languages enjoy a social base and cultural rootedness, the elitist nature of the use of English in India gives writing by Indians in English a 'national' character and the status of a national literature.

MODULE 2

Translation: Theories, Approaches, and Key Terms

Introduction

Translation is a communicative process that involves linguistic and socio- linguistic factors. When we communicate what someone else has said, we do not always remember the exact words. We paraphrase, retell, substitute and make gestures. While translating, the translator faces many difficulties. Words like *karma*, *may a*, *roti*, and *dhoti* have no direct equivalents in European languages. But even where we use common English words, meanings can differ in different cultures. The process of translation can be understood within following theoretical frames.

1. Linguistic Theory of Translation

Translation is a process of transferring content and meaning from one language-culture into another. A common problem faced by a translator is to decide the equivalents in the two languages. Translators use three approaches to translation depending on the language unit they focus on. They are:

- ≡ Translation at the level of word (word for word translation)
- ≡ Translation at the level of sentence, and
- ≡ Conceptual translation

2. Translation and Literary Theory

A literary text, especially a poem, is unique, whole and original. In translation of literature, difficulty arises in finding the equivalent textual and literary material of the source language in the target language. Literature incorporates literary as well as metaphorical language. It is crucial for the translator to decide what part of the language must be reproduced in the TL text.

3. Translation and Cultural Theory

Translation involves two languages and two cultures. The translator has to decide on the importance given to certain cultural aspects in the source language text and to what extent it is necessary and possible to translate them into the target language text. While translating terms like *maama*, *periappa* and *chitappa*, saying "uncle" in English will not give the correct meaning in all contexts. Translation has to be faithful to both languages and cultures.

Translation: Approaches and Types

The translator's work essentially consists of conveying the meaning expressed by the original writer. In such instances, the translator is a mere message conveyor. For example, legal translation leaves little room for adaptation and re-writing. Similarly, when it comes to translating insurance contracts, style-related concerns are not important to the translating process; what the reader needs is a translated text that is faithful to the source text in meaning, regardless of the stylistic skills of the translator.

Translation can be classified according to the approaches and according to disciplines. In terms of approaches, the different types of translation are: literal, direct, transliteration, transcreation. In terms of disciplines: literary, non-literary, media, scientific, technical.

Approach-based Classification

(a) Literal Translation

Literal translation is the word for word, line by line turning of an author's words from one language into another.

(b) Transliteration

Transliteration refers to the process by which one reads and pronounces the words and sentences of one language using the letters and special symbols of another language. Transliteration is helpful in situations where one does not know the script of a language but knows to speak and understand the language nevertheless.

Here are some examples of Roman transliteration used to represent texts of Indian languages, especially Sanskrit.

Iswara Eswaraa eesvara spfel prarthana praarthanaa prArthanA R^Ashi ruSi rishi
Transliteration is used in situations where the original script is not available to write down a word in that script.

(c) Transcreation

In instances where word for word translation may not be effective, the concept of transcreation comes into effect. Transcreation is the creative adaptation of source language material in the target language. It adapts the material in a culturally relevant manner in order for it to reach the target at an emotional and intellectual level. Successful transcreation is based on a thorough knowledge of local environment, practices and details specific to a given culture and country.

Literary Translation

It deals with the translation of literary texts. The translator cannot take literary language at face value. It has a symbolic value.

Translators of literary texts should keep in mind the metaphorical language used in the literary text of the source language and try to retain its value while translating. The translator should aim to convey not just the sense, but the idiom too, for the appeal to remain intact. Translations should give the 'feel'/ essence of the language.

Glossary of Translation Terms

1. **Adaptation** - translation of the spirit of the text not just the meaning from SL to TL
2. **Bilingual** - involving two languages
3. **Computer Assisted Translation** - using technology / software for translating contents
4. **Dynamic Equivalence** - a translation principle according to which a translator seeks to translate the meaning of the original in such a way that the TL wording will produce the same impact on the TL audience as the original wording does upon the SL audience. (Nida & Taber)
5. **Equivalence** - referring to words having the same meaning in both the languages.
6. **Formal Equivalence** - TL item which represents the closest equivalent of a SL word or phrase. (Nida & Taber)
7. **Free Translation** - translation of ideas without any restrictions
8. **Gisting** - containing just the main ideas
9. **Idioms** - a phrase where the words collectively have a meaning that is different from the dictionary definitions of the individual words
10. **Literal Translation** - word for word translation
11. **Literary Translation** - translation of literary works
12. **Localization** - the process of translating and adapting the content and the presentation of a text catering to the language and cultural characteristics of the target audience or region parallel text
13. **Lossless Translation** - also called reversible or round trip translation - no data is lost during decompression
14. **Lossy Translation** - a data encoding method that decompresses the data content, particularly multimedia data. The final output is different from the original as some data are lost in the process.
15. **Machine Translation** - the use of computer software to translate text or speech from one human language to another.
16. **Metaphrase** - the method of turning a text, i.e., word by word and line by line from one language into another. It is not a literal translation.
- 17- **Multilingual** - involving many languages
18. **Phrase to Phrase Translation** - translation of a group of words at a time
19. **Source Language (SL)** - The language from which a translation is to be made. Usually referred to as L1
20. **Source Language text (SLT)** - The text belonging to the source language
21. **Target Language (TL)** - the language into which a text, document, etc., is translated. Usually referred to as L2
22. **Target Language Text (TLT)** - The text belonging to the target language
23. **Transcreation** - translation and recreation of a text in another language, An adaptation of a creative work into another language or culture.
24. **Transcription** - converting speech into a written or electronic text document

25. **Translation** - a written or spoken rendering of the meaning of a word, speech, book etc., in another language
26. **Transliteration** - representation (of a word etc.) in the closest corresponding letters or characters of a different alphabet or language
27. **Untranslatability** - a property of a text, or utterance in SL with no equivalent text or utterance in TL
28. **Word to Word Translation** - literal translation

Summing Up

- Translation is defined as the transference of meaning from the source language to the target language
- Traditionally, translation was seen as an aspect of Linguistics
- The items which proved particularly untranslatable were described as culture-specific
- A translation of a text meant not just transaction between two languages, but a negotiation between two cultures
- In translation of literature, difficulty arises in finding the equivalent textual and literary material of the source language in the target language
- Language and culture are closely related and both aspects must be considered for translation
- A text in translation, just as any other direct communication text, includes an extra dimension, that of the reader of the text
- Transliteration is the process by which one reads and pronounces the words and sentences of one language using the letters and special symbols of another language
- Transcreation is the creative adaptation of source language material in the target language
- Literary translations recreate the ideas and emotions of the text, not just the words, which are mere symbols of the same
- The socio-cultural background of a language is necessary for literary translations