

# History of Translation

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**Abstract:** Translation is the part of literature which bridges the gap between the communities, their language and culture. It reflects and reveals the true self of a language, culture and literature in front of the world, the only way to perceive the literature of the innumerable languages in the world; translation bears a proud history of bridging the gaps of two languages and culture. It is the way to take the essence of an author to the global platform. This study attempts to catalogue the history of translation and shed light into its past instances around the world. The study also attempts to shed light briefly to the definition, concept and perception of translation.

**Keywords:** Translation, History of Translation, Culture, Literature

## 1. Introduction

Translation is an important part of the flowing culture of the human civilization. It bridges the gap between the communities, their language and culture. A translated work unites two writers, two languages, two lessons, two cultures, two communities and two groups of audience. Translation is the way to take the essence of an author to the global platform. As in the history of literature, translation also has a proud and ancient tradition. It is an excellent medium of communication. Translation is the way to take down the barriers between two language cultures and unite them. The translation literature of today has evolved much to reach the height of today. It is the only way to perceive the literature of the innumerable languages in the world.

### Objectives and significance of the study:

Translation is a laborious task indeed. However, it can reflect and reveal the true self of a language, culture and literature in front of the world. But it needs excellence and expertise in both the source language and the target language. Since translation has been around for a long time, it is very important to know the proud history of this noble work. Study of translation remains incomplete without the knowledge of its history. However, there remains a gap in the many studies about translation. Thus, this study on the history of translation is expected to help the peer researchers to collect more data and to seed more thoughts. This study attempts to catalogue the history of translation and shed light into its past instances around the world.

## 2. Methodology

This study is an analytical study which attempts to shed light briefly to the definition, concept and perception of translation. This is an exploratory study which attempts to gather and catalogue the history of translation around the world. The primary source of the study is the book "Anubaad Parikrama" by Prafulla Kataki. Various books, research papers, articles, symposium etc. are taken as the secondary sources.

### Meaning of Translation

The term 'translation' comes from the verb 'to translate'. The root of the word is Latin. It derives from the latin word *Translatio*, which in turn comes from *Trans* (meaning across) and *Latus* (a derivative of the verb *ferre* which

means 'to fetch'). Thus, *translatio*, or translation in English is to fetch across or to carry across (in this case, from one language to another). The Assamese term for translation is *Anubaad*. It comes from the Sanskrit language. *Anu* is a prefix which means afterwards or later and *baad* means 'to speak'. Thus *anubaad* is to speak afterwards. In the Sanskrit-English dictionary by Sir Monier Williams, the meaning of *anubaad* is given as, "saying after or again, repeating by way of explanation. Explanatory repetition translation" (Kataki, P. *Anubaad Parikrama*. P-2). Thus we can say, translation or *anubaad* is to explain the essence of a text from one language to the other.

### Translation- concept and definition:

There are many opinions regarding the definition of translation. The eastern scholar Mahabeer Prasad Dwivedi defines translation as the transference of the essence (Dwivedi.M.P. Kumar sambhabam(trans.) introduction). According to Bholanath Tiwari, translation is use of elements of another language, natural and similar to the original language elements.(Tiwari,B. *Anubaad Bigyan*. P-16-17) There has been an ancient ongoing debate on whether translation is a science or an art. This is a natural consequence of the evolvement of the discipline. Science is specialized and aims to theorize, analyze and categorize with empirical assistance. Although, translation does not go that far, some Indian and western scholars categorize translation as a science. However, the words art, creativity, creation, recreation etc. are used more commonly about translation. George Steiner noted in *After Babel* that, what we are dealing with is not a science but exact art. Thus, all literature are creative art and their translations are a form of art as well. Naida also acknowledges translation to be too great to be bound by the rules of science. Many scholars place translation as the combination of practicality and art. While the translator needs to proceed scientifically during translation, it is a creative art. A translation is only successful when the translator is well versed in language skills, artistic and logical dimensions and creative arts. Thus we can call translation a perfect blend of science, arts and creativity.

### Classification of translation

While oral translation is the oldest version of the creative art in question, the scholars have classified it in three types of classifications-

- 1) By the nature of translation : thus the translations can be divided into several classes such as a. word-to word, b. essence to essence, c. shadow translation, d. gist translation, e. elaboration, f. oral translation, g. transcription, h. model translation, i. interpretation etc.
- 2) By the way of translation: thus the translations can be divided into a. text translation and b. effect translation.
- 3) By the languages: thus the translations can be divided into three, viz, a. Intra-language, b. Inter-language and c. representational or figurative.

Renowned western scholar Kateford classified translation as faithful, idiomatic and class. Again, translation can be divided into three by the style- prose, verse and poetical (muktak sanda). Also, translations can be classified by the translators, viz, human translations and mechanical translations.

### History of translation

Translation is as ancient as the literature itself. The oldest example of translation, the Rosetta Stone, which bears inscriptions in two ancient Egyptian languages- hieroglyphic and Demotic and their translations in ancient Greek. The Assyrian emperor Sargon made translated copies of the verses on his courage and praise as early as 3000 BC. Hammurabi, the king from Babylonian dynasty, made translations of his law orders.

Both the West and East boast of a history of translation dating back to the ancient times. The westerners are known to translate the Holy Bible while the Indians translated the Vedanta. The history of translation in the West can be divided into three parts-

- 1) The times before the birth of Christ and up to second or third century AD, this period was the time of literary and religious translation. The literature and texts were translated from Hebrew to ancient Greek. By the fifth century, the Old Testament was translated to ancient Greek, and the epics, tragedy, comedy, songs, prose narratives etc were translated.
- 2) The period between fifth century to fifteenth century can be called the dark times of European history. However, some books were translated in Latin and Greek.
- 3) The renaissance and modern era: the translations started gathering momentum from these times. Up until the Second World War, mostly the poetry were the aim of translation. Later they spread to various disciplines such as science, Law and order, banking, technical, etc.

### Translation in Greece and Rome

The epic poem Gilgamesh was translated in several Asian languages as early as 2000 BC. On 280 BC, Livius Antonius translated the Odyssey to Latin verses. St Jerome translated the New testament of the Holy Bible to Latin at 365 BC, at 370 BC 72 translators collaborated to translate the Old testament from Hebrew to Ancient Greek. The Arabian Nights were translated to the European languages at about this period. Moreover, Cicero translated Plato's Protagoras and other Greek works to Latin during the first century.

### Translation in Arabia

The Arabians were historic in their works of translation. During the period between tenth century and twelfth

century, the Ancient Greek philosophical and scientific texts were translated in Bagdad. The Indian Sanskrit texts including Astrology, Arithmetic, Algebra, chemistry, Tarkashastra, Medicine etc were translated to Arabic as early as 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> century.

### Translation in China

The first book translated to Chinese and published was the Hirak Sutra from India. During the period between 67 AD to 1285 AD, many Buddhist texts written in Sanskrit and Pali were translated to Chinese. Scholars like Fahien, Huen chang not only took the Buddhist texts to their country, but also translated them into Chinese. Huen change (693-694) translated 74 books to Chinese during the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

### Translation in English

The tradition of translation started in England during 9<sup>th</sup> century. Many books including historical texts were translated to Latin and then to English during the reign of King Alfred. The history of translation in England can be divided into two parts- the Elizabethan period from the reign of King Henry VIII to the 17th century and the modern period. Jeofrey Chaucer (1380-1400) was the first translator and poet of England. He translated the bible on 1382 as well as the epics, tales, the Ramaunt of the Rose etc. are among his translated works. In 1486, L'Morte de Arthur by Mallory was translated into English. The Froissart chronicles, the Golden book of Marcus Auralius ec were translated at that period. Also Thomas translated the Plutarch from Greek to French, Philemon Holland translated Plini's Natural History. The Irish poet Thomas Shelton translated Don Quixote, Homer. Dryden (1631-1700) translated Virgil's Aeneid in verses. Alexander Pope (1688-1744) translated Homer's Iliad and Odyssey. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the prose translation were emphasized more to verses. S F Cary translated Dante's Divina Comedia, Coleridge translated Schillar's Valenstein and Shelley translated the hymns of Goethe and Homer. The Victorian period, saw a new light in the translation works. The language were tinted in classical and the verses were styled as in the olden days. This aimed to express the essence, picture and time of the source texts. Mourice and A.J White together translated the anglo saxon epic Beowulf. Fitzgerald's translation of Omar Khoyaam, Campbell's 700 page translation of the Holy Bible are counted as masterpieces. At 1871, Benjamin translated Plato's The Republic. The 1964 prose translation of Homer's Odyssey by E.D. Riu is of higher artistic than those done before.

The second period of English translation, the modern period starts from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This period saw the emphasis on prose translation for the distribution of science and philosophy. Arthur Waley's translation of Chinese poetry, Robert Graves's translation of the poems of Jvana de cruz, the varse translations of Mensfield, J.E. Flever and Stephan Spendario, Norman Cameron's Villone, J.B. Nicheman's translation of Rilke etc. have taken the English translation literature to a new height. Also the translation of the complete works of John of the Cross is a beautiful example of haunting language and flowing poetic verses.

Another milestone in the history of translation works of English language is the translations from Russian to English.

The Twelve by Aleksandr Blok and Viktor's "I believe sang the guns and squares" were translated into beautiful lyrical languages. Charles Tomlinson translated the poetic works of Russian poet Fyodor Tyutchev into English beautifully. As did Herbert Marshall in translating the contemporary Russian poems like Yesmin. The American poet W.S. Merbin, translated and gave music to the Spanish traditional musicals. Robert Graves, Rex Burner, Michael Grant, Abreceline Court, Jackson Knight etc. translated the ancient proses in simple languages. C. De Lewis translated Aeneid, Laurence Bean translated Georgies and Dorothy Choice translated Divine Comedy.

This Modern era, the tradition of translation has not spared the drama and novels. Scott Moncrief's translation of Foust, Edwin and Villemoor's translations of Kafka's works, Emone Bilkins, Ernest Cheshre, Henry Reed, Archibald Kalcohen are the names among such translations. David Maguire, Rosemary Edmunds have translated many literary masterpieces to English. The complete works of Freud and Jung have also been translated to English. It has been clear that the translation of the Holy Bible jumpstarted the tradition of translation in England. Many have been involved in the translation of the Bible during 1382 and 1390 to 1610.

#### Translation and India

In India, at first the translations were from Sanskrit to other languages. Gradually the reverse also started and many masterpieces of other languages were translated into Sanskrit. Among them, Hamlet, The Tempest, Foust, Kaler Jatra, Rubaiyat, Bihari satsah are notable. For the sake of convenience, the British translated various administrative documents, Tipu Sultan's diary and letters, the memoirs of Mohanlal Kasmiri etc. to English. On the other hand, Indian language and literature thrives since the Natyashastra by Bharat Muni. The Veda, Upanishad, Ramayan, Mahabharata, purana etc. literature were translated to other Indian languages. Moreover, the Indologists from different parts of the world translated the Sanskrit and Pali books, Panini's Astadhyayi, Sakuntala, Vedas, Upanishad, geetgobinda, ritusamhar etc. into various languages such as German, Russian and French.

The Indian tradition of translation into Hindi language started from Bharatendu Yuga. William Jones translated Parsi poems to Hindi. At 1789 Kalidas's Abhigyanam Sakuntalam was translated into English, William Moor translated Bible to Hindi. At 1872 Raja Rammohan Roy translated Vedanta Sutra to English. Hitopodesh by Badrilal, Sakuntala by Raja Lakshman Singh etc. were notable. Bharatendu translated the Merchant of Venice as well as some Sanskrit and Bengali books to Hindi.

The foremost among the next translation works are, Romeo and Juliet "Premlila" by Gopinath Purohit. Bridal Nights "Suhagrat" by Mahaveer Prasad Dwivedi, Francis Bacon and Kalidas's works in Hindi, Marathi article Maladarsh by Chiplunkar, translated by Gangaprasad Agnihotri, Shreedhar Pathak's translation of Goldsmith's Traveller, Deserted Village and Hermit.

Another celebrated translator Shuklahas successfully translated Arnold's Light of Asia as Buddhacharit,

Megasthenese's Indica, The Riddle of the Universe, ten articles "pleasures of imaginations" by Joseph Edison as Kalpana ke anand.

In the modern age, Maithili Charan Gupta has done beautiful translations of Meghnad Badh (by Michael Madhusudan Dutta) and Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat. Bacchan has translated the dramas such as Hamlet, Macbeth, Rubaiyat, Madhushala etc. in addition to Gupta and Bacchan, the translators like Nirala, Pant, Bharatbhushan Agrawal, Kuwar Narayan, Mahendra Chaturvedi, Gargi Gupta, RK Narayanan, Amrita Pritam, Viswanath Ayyar, Rajmani Sharma, Bholanath Tiwari etc. are revered as the crème à la crème of the modern translators. Now-a-days, the translation works have come to their own in the languages like Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati, Punjabi, Hindi etc. as well. Since India has 22 official languages and all of them have language cultures of their own, translation is unavoidably important for the popularization of these literatures.

### 3. Conclusion

Translation is the transformation of human feelings and communication from one language to another. It started from the thirst of knowledge buried inside the psyche of the human beings. The human mind wishes to acquaint themselves to all sources of knowledge available to them, in which the barrier that comes foremost is the barrier of language. Thus to take down the barrier of language, standing in the road to knowledge, science, philosophy, art, along came the translation works. Thus it has been a surprisingly apt medium of communication and no doubt it shall keep being so for eons. The tradition and its timelessness itself shows its importance and scope. Thus we ought to attempt to keep alive the tradition of translation and let it thrive, so the thirst of knowledge within every human being is quenched.

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