

Literary Translation: A Need for Rapid Educational Activity**Dr V.V.B. Rama Rao**

India is not just a vast country. It is also a country with many languages, many beliefs and many cultural variations. Our literatures are multi lingual and multi cultural. During the last decades our educational system has been undergoing many changes to vie with advanced countries for rapid development. What is needed immediately is an activity for national integration in a systematic manner. People, and to begin with, students, should be helped and enthused to understand literatures in other languages. Good understanding of other regional language literatures promotes integration. While under foreign rule, our students were being taught English and little real encouragement was given to knowing regional literatures. No effort was made to bring together our regional languages and still less to our regional literatures. About seventy years ago, when we were students, a feeble effort used to be made to teach translation from regional language into English but it was not literary translation at all. We did not have any opportunity to learn anything about the literature of even our neighboring states, called provinces then.

In recent decades Translation Studies are offered as a course in universities thought not in colleges. Students are taught translation but no real effort is put forward to make literary translation an interesting or productive activity. Still, regional literatures are coming out in translation by many practitioners who did not have any *formal training* in literary translation or rendering. This is done out of love for literature with a capacity to understand a text in one language and an ability to express the object and beauty of the text in a target language. The courses are not always put in the activity for rapid practice. What is really needed is the artistic activity for cultural understanding and eventual integration. Knowing, reading and understanding at least one regional literature besides one's own language is essential for the student to become a competent practitioner.

Some hold the view that putting an idea into a language is a translation in itself. When once an idea is expressed in a language taking the idea and feeling in it into another language is translation. Then there are different kinds of ideas and different kinds of translation. For example in manuals some instructions and explanations are given but this is not related to creative expression and for that reason it is not called literary translation with feeling, thought and imagination. Translating a literary discourse, story, poem or fiction is not a mere simple act. In this act, the practitioner transforms the text in one language into another, not always a similar language. Each regional language has its own ways of expression and delicacy of nuances. Though English is now recognized as an Indian language, translating regional language nuances

into English is not always an easy task. The practitioner has to be patient and wary with a special skill.

One important point to remember is that there can be no one to one correspondence in a regional language and the basically foreign language, English. The act is something more than easy translation: it is an artistic endeavour. If one insists on making translation a rigid scientific concept, literary translation can be easily called a rendering giving the practitioner an opportunity to take necessary liberties to make the literary text accessible to many in his own kind of expression. This is an art and not a science and as such it defies rigorous theory.

Aesthetic considerations play a crucial role in practicing this art. In creative writing there is a special significance in the use of vocabulary, syntax and expressive devices. These lead to complex problems which the practitioner has to tackle with his ingenuity and commitment. There may be many ways in which a literary text can be rendered into another language. Poetry, for example, is a highly imaginative writing which usually lends itself to a variety of interpretation or exegesis. The literary translator needs to be deft trying to carry the suggestiveness implied in the original text.

For the understanding and appreciation of a literary text, having a kind of like-heartedness, called *sahridaya* in Sanskrit, is necessary. For a practitioner, this is essential. The translator-transcreators who have 'rendered' texts into our regional languages centuries ago were great imaginative artists themselves. Their capacity to envision and intuit has earned laurels for them. They must have considered their work a holy duty of redeeming *rishiruna*, their debt to the sage and saint-like writers. This love and esteem for the original text/creative artist, not theory, makes the task easy for the practitioner. Training may not be needed for some who have the flair and knack. For example Lawrence Venuti, a distinguished practitioner revealed to his Indian interviewer years ago: "I translated five books from Italian (into English) before I began thinking in explicitly theoretical terms about my writing work."¹ It was only after he translated that the theory drove his practice.

It is a fact that literary translation does not have much of a rigorous theory. Translating different texts may have different objectives and may have different techniques. Literary translation is an activity that belongs more to the domain of art than to the domain of scientific pursuit. It is true that even for art or music training is necessary as an academic pursuit. We have now, as pointed earlier, some training in the universities in their departments of Translation Studies, at the M.Phil stage. This is fine, but what is more desirable is starting attractive training programs from the undergraduate level. It may be made an elective subject which would eventually lead to eventual lucrative employment

Literature of the regional languages need to be translated into English since English, the world language, has become the language for our country to go up in the comity of nations. We have

twenty-two languages in the Eighth Schedule of our constitution and in most of our schools English is taught. Besides our mother tongue in the regional language, another regional language too needs to be taught. Understanding the literary compositions in the regional languages would be possible with the activity of literary translation. For those in the South, the great texts of the East, North and West, if made available in English would be extremely useful. Already some translated texts from other regional languages may be available in English but no systematic effort is made to encourage renderings with a view to enhancing the understanding of texts from many regional languages. Extensive literary translation has to be pursued as an urgent necessity in view of the multiplicity of our regional languages and the availability of texts that need to be taken into another language or, for wider coverage, into English for our readers with a flair for understanding cultural variety and richness.

Some basics are necessary to be taught at the undergraduate level in literary translation to begin with. There are many kinds of translations. Translations vary according to the need and according to the target reader the translator has in mind. For example, they may be intended to be used (eventually or immediately) for learning a language and cultivating literary appreciation in the target language. These demand extensive notes not only on lexical, semantic, syntactic items but also on expressive literary devices. If the translator does not know for certain the prospective use of his work, he would not be able to give the reader what may be deemed essential. Pedagogic Translations ought to be different from translations for the general reader.

There could be interactive translation. Interactive translation is possible only when the original writer and the translator can exchange notes on translating texts at every stage so that translation is evaluated by the original writer himself in terms of fidelity etc. This kind of translation ensures credibility and authenticity. The writer and the translator confer and the translator's task becomes easier and difficult at the same time. This need not be explained in detail. Then there is Collective Translation also to increase the credibility and the dependability of the translation. This is resorted to by institutions like Sahitya Akademi. A number of translators are assembled at a place where a work is discussed first and later assigned to different hands. It is discussed, commented on and guided. Fresh drafts are discussed again, revised and edited for sending to the press. Some kind of uniformity is assured when different translators translate different bits under the guidance and supervision of a general editor. The object is to communicate the very the best of a literary text with co-operative effect.

When we are concerned with literary translation, it should be our aim to take as much of the beauty and significance of the source text into the target text. In matters of style, diction, expression etc what is most important is appropriateness, aptness, and felicity in the target language. There are some basic points to bear in mind. The idea of a translation, by and large, is to present the original work to a reader from another language in a language known to him. It is obvious that every item of beauty in the text of the original language cannot be fully put across in

another language. Notwithstanding the innumerable inherent limitations of translation, every effort has to be made to convey as much as possible. The reader of a translated text does not fully appreciate the grandeur of the original but conveying something not meant, not intended and not supposed to be intended would be unfair both to the new reader and the writer of the original. It would be a fairly satisfactory effort on the part of the translator to give some idea of the eminence in the writing to the extent the reader wouldn't be disappointed. He has come to the translation of a text, which he feels worthwhile reading at least in translation. Literary translation is a service and a service it remains no matter what detractors may say.

Dealing with metrical verse, it is not easy to render it into a similar metre. Many translators translate metrical verse into free verse to make their work possible and easy. No two languages may have the same metrical forms. Each language has its own turn of phrase and idiom and beauties in one language may not be retained when translated into another. Still, literary translation of poetry, specially, has many practitioners as well as takers. If a translator is unduly worried about negative criticism from people who happen to know both the languages well, he should have faith in *sahridaya*. A good translator should brave even uncharitable and unholy criticism at times. He should know his limitations.

Social markers, markers of cultural levels, registers, and technical words, need to be carried into the target language with utmost caution. The translator could be faulted for taking too much for granted from his reader or, in the other extreme, underestimating the reader. Pedagogic translations, meant more to learners, may be an exception to this. Too many explanations and too many footnotes distract. And then the most important thing is the stance of the translator. The freedom-fidelity problems need to be carefully balanced. Freedom is a necessity for the practitioner but how far and then fidelity: fidelity to the present reader or to the original text. The ideal thing is to be inviting, enthusing and encouraging the reader to get the feel of the original text. It is essential to be reader-friendly and the fidelity to the target reader is obviously a little more important than fidelity to the original text.

The validity of a translated text does not depend totally on one to one correspondence between the original and the translated texts. Some parts, fragments may have to be omitted; some may have to be excised in extra-ordinary situations as was done by me in translating for Sahitya Akademi Narendrapal Singh's Punjabi novel translated by himself into English as *Trapped*. Certain passages describing homosexual exploits etc., unsavoury to Telugu readers, had to be passed over. Even after that the novel invited a lot of severe criticism even in Telugu. It is useful to retain some words of the original, especially terms of kinship, items of dress, words of address, interjections, expletives, items of food, clothing etc. not only in unrelated but even in cognate receptor languages. The receptor language stands to gain some loans from the original, when they eventually become familiar and popular. Translated texts can contribute to the growth of the receptor language in terms of lexis.

The best way to enjoy reading Greek Tragedy is to read it in Greek but very few possess that ability. We all know that Greek tragedy is worth knowing about and for that reason we go to translations. It is for that reason that translation is necessary. No one who knows Greek would read a Greek tragedy in English translation except for some kind of a critical assessment. It is easy to pick holes in a translated text but then what is unforgettable is that without a measure of charity and empathy appreciating a literary text either in original or in translation is not possible. While at this point, it is useful to evolve some definite dos and don'ts while judging translated texts.

In the first instance it would be useful to put one's self in the position of the target reader. The reasonable assumptions that a translator can make regarding the target reader have already been mentioned. Translators would do well first to stop under-estimating his target reader. Then one should be clear about the purpose of the translation. Another criterion could be judging the extent of help offered in footnotes, explanations of cultural items etc. Excess is always to be avoided. The practitioner is supposed to exercise his judgement carefully, most importantly, in this matter.

Having decided that we are interested in literary translation, we have to study the texts first to devise a strategy in terms of translating various features like style, grammar, syntax, vocabulary, structure, idiom, expressive devices and so on.

Translating texts in a foreign language into an English language is a more different and difficult job than translating texts from one Indian language into another. Though ours is a 'plural' society and multi-lingual situation, ours is a single cultural entity in the larger context for we share a basic heritage and tradition. Terms relating to food, kinship, things we use in daily life, occupations etc. draw from an almost single large matrix. Our epics, legends and beliefs and convictions are similar though there are differences too. Even when there is variety and difference there is never so much of a communication breakdown. The context in most cases gives some kind of clue to what is being mentioned. A common system of belief and way of living makes terms easy to find in other language communities. When we translate a foreign language text, say a language like French or Russian, the life styles and the heritage being totally different make translation of terms difficult.

There is no theory extant that I know of which deals with intra-national language translation. The theories available do not throw any light on our problems and still less are they of any help in practice. It is true that theorists have been coming up with crisp terms that enrich technical glossaries. Many of the concepts and terms are indicative though not strictly relevant to intra-national language translation practices. 'Domestication' and 'foreignization' for example are not relevant in the contexts of *Bhashas* of which English has been allowed admission several years after the colonizers left for good. If putting an idea into language is one kind of 'translation' activity, translating that into another language is another, more

difficult, process. In the first instance it is less complex but the second translator poses several problems. In creative writing there is a special significance intended in the use of vocabulary and expressive devices. Aesthetic considerations play a very important role. This leads to complex problems very frequently. First, Translating an Indian Language Text into another Indian language is less difficult than translating a foreign language text into an Indian language. Translating a French, Russian or English text into languages like Hindi or Telugu is more difficult. This is so because of the differences in cultural background, customs and beliefs, life styles and so on. Then the demands vary when translating factual writing, writing for communicating information or instruction. There are so many ways in which a literary text, which is a piece of creative-writing, can be rendered into another language. This is not the case in factual, informative writing where the purpose is comparatively narrow and limited. Poetry, for example is imaginative writing, which, usually, lends itself to a wide variety of interpretations. The translator needs to be very resourceful and equipped to make his translation as suggestive and as communicative as the writer of the original text.

When we accept that there is an immediate need for rapid educational activity to promote literary translation, more problems and solutions can be discussed.

Work Cited:

1. Asaduddin and Venuti Lawrence in Conversation, *THE BOOK REVIEW*, Vol XXVI No7, July 2002