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# Translating Cultures
## *Sanskriti*: *Anuvad-Vivad*

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***Abstract*:**

Translation is more than a mere transfer of meaning from one language into another as it involves a complex process of negotiating between different cultures. In this process, the importance of cultural context cannot be underestimated. Ancient Indian theorists emphasized that both verbal and cultural meanings should be conveyed by a translation for it to be successful. Translators have to choose between formal correspondence and dynamic equivalence. This leads to a controversy over the appropriateness of foreignization and domestication as translation methods. Analyses of various translations of foreign texts into Indian languages may lead one to choose a middle path between these two extremes.

***Keywords*:** *languacultures*, literariness, *pramanaantar*, autonomous aspect, communicative aspect, formal correspondence, dynamic equivalence, *cultureme*

Language, an important part of culture, grows in a socio-cultural context and is used in all kinds of literary creation. With so many languages around us, translation grew as a natural phenomenon for fulfilling social necessities and disseminating human expressions.

However, there is a clear historical division between the perception that language is culture and the perception that language and culture are two distinct entities and therefore translation is seen by them, as a universalist encoding-decoding linguistic activity, transferring meaning from the source language to the target language, using what M.J. Reddy called the method of "conduit metaphor of language transference.'[2] In this conception of translation, culture and cultural differences can be carried by the language without any significant loss. Others such as Eugene Nida believe that "the context actually provides more distinction of meaning than the term being analysed." Hence, meaning is not 'carried' by the language but is negotiated between readers from within the contexts of their own culture.

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[2] M.J. Reddy, "The Conduit Metaphor" in A. Ortony (ed.) *Metaphor and Thought*, pp. 164–201, 1973/1993.

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Readers are hence bound to receive the text according to their own expectations, and translation is necessarily a relativist form of 'manipulation' (Hermans 1985),[3] 'meditation' (Katan 1999 [2004])[4] or 'refraction' (Lefevere)[5] between two different languacultures (Agar 1994).[6] In other words, language always rests on the dialectical relationship between complex linguistic and extensive cultural systems. Nida, Newmark and many others rejected the linguistic theories of translation which deal with word and text as a unit but do not go beyond to take into consideration aspects of culture. Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere even dismissed the efforts of the earlier translation theorists who undertook painstaking comparisons between the source text and its translation by arguing that these exercises do not place the text in its cultural environment.

Culture as an integral part of language is never lost sight of in translation studies but sometimes it is emphasised more or at other times, less but never entirely ignored. Bassnett and Lefevere rightly go beyond language and focus on the interaction between translation and culture, on the way in which culture impacts and constrains translation and "on the larger issues of context, history and convention."[7]

According to ancient Indian theorists the inner significance of the meaning is rooted in the context of the verbal art and that determines the 'literariness' of the artefact and without this knowledge the translation is never successful and therefore both the verbal and cultural contexts facilitate in recoding the text by the reader-translator for a meaning which emancipates *artha* from material reality. Kayyat and even Tolkapiyar refer to *pramanaantar* or the contextual meaning; when this meaning is transferred translation becomes a reality.[8]

In the heyday of linguistic translation theories, equivalence in the translation process was perceived as a dialectic between the linguistic and cultural systems of the writer and those of the translator. These took into consideration the

i) dimensions of language user – geographical origin, social class and time
ii) the dimensions of language use – medium (simple/complex)
iii) the social role (relationship between the addresser and the addressees)
iv) social attitude (the degree of social formality as evident in style)

As a result, the source text is developed having a linguistic as well as a cultural frame.

The translator also lives in her/his own socio-cultural context and while analysing the text s/he is governed by the linguistic and cultural systems and the end-product is the semiotic transformation of autonomous and communicative aspects of sign orders. For this

[3] T. Hemans, (ed.) *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation*, 1985.
[4] D. Katan, *Translating Cultures: An Introduction for Translators, Interpreters and Mediators*, 1999/2004
[5] A. Lefevere, "Mother Courage's Cucumbers", in L. Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*, pp. 239-55, 2004 [1982].
[6] M. Agar, *Language Shock: Understanding the Culture of Conversation*, 1994.
[7] Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere (Eds.), *Translation, History and Culture*, 1998, P. 11.
[8] I.N. Choudhuri, "Towards an Indian Theory of Translation", *Indian Literature*, vol. LIV, no. 5 (259: Sep/Oct 2010)

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reason, the translator realises that equivalence in translation should not be approached as a search for sameness. Equivalence rests on the relationship between signs, what they stand for (autonomous aspect) and those who use them (communicative aspect).

These two referential systems (the linguistic and cultural systems of the writer and the translator) help us understand the translated version of a literary text with reference to the translator's strategies, and the degree of objectivation, the extent to which the general is modified or replaced by the specific and the type of bilingualism.

Comparison of seven significant English translations of *Gita Govinda*—William Jones (1792), Edwin Arnold (1875), George Keats (1940), Lakshmi Narayan Shastri (1956), Duncan Greenlees (1962), Monika Varma (1968) and Barbara Stoler Miller (1977)—provides not only an insight into literature but also captures the change in sensibility that marks different epochs and the mood and temperament of the translator. In fact, this kind of a comparative study of the source text having linguistic/literary and extra-literary conventions gives an idea of the literary idiom and cultural tenor of the source text and its translations in different ages and brings forth unique cross-cultural manifestations of the original.

Because of the personality and period of the history of the translator and the language s/he uses, the impact of linguistic, generic, or ideological forces remains so powerful that we may have different tastes in different works of translation.

We may notice as explained by John Fletcher[9] that Yeats's rendering of Ronsard's "When you are old", a fine poem in its right, alters the tone of the original fundamentally. Ronsard is confident that his verses will immortalize the lady but chides her for her arrogance. Yeats eliminates the element of arrogance. Here a great poet takes a theme from another great poet and recasts it in a subdued manner entirely his own. Analysis of this kind of translation helps us establish an "explosive contact" with the author and the translator and nurtures an interest in cross cultural translation studies.

In this study of translating cultures one can benefit from a systematic comparison of six significant translations in Hindi of the Omar Khayyam's *The Rubaiyat*. All these are retranslations from the English translation of the book by Edward Fitzgerald. One of the *rubaiyats* as translated by Fitzgerald goes like this:

Dreaming when Dawn's left hand was in

the sky

I heard a voice within the tavern cry

Awake my little ones, and fill the cup

Before life's liquor in its cup be dry.

[9] John Fletcher, "The Criticism of Comparison...", in Malcolm Bradbury et al (eds.), *Contemporary Criticism*, p. 127.

Now 'my little ones' is wrong translation of Khayyam's 'A rind kharavati' which means 'drunkards of the tavern.'

This wrong translation continuing in the Hindi translations gives rise to different connotative meanings in the minds of various translators according to different cultural contexts which they inhabit. Harivansharai Bachan translates it as "mere sishuo nadan", Keshab Pathak as "mere sishudal' and Maithilisaran Gupta as 'o mere bachhe". Sumitranandan Pant has a pedagogic attitude to this term and translates it as "madira ke chhatra". Bachachan does not stop at the filling of the cup and persuades others to drink the wine, "bujha lo pi pi madira bhukh". Maithlisaran Gupta, being a vaishnavite, slowly utters "patra bharo na vilamba karo", as if he is afraid of drinking.

A comparison of these translations can shed light not only on the changes in a given civilisation's attitude towards literature, but also on the changes in a society's attitude towards certain other aspects of culture. These culture-bound attitudes so thoroughly stylise our perceptions that we experience our 'traditionality' as natural but without going deep into the historical causes, the roots of determinism which underlie the 'recursive' structure of our sensibility and expressive codes we cannot translate properly.

The cultural contexts of a given discourse could be deep-rooted, e.g., in "Asadhya Veena" by Ajneya the terms *kesha kambali, gufa-geha, hata sadhana, krricha tapa* are taken from the Buddhist Hinayana yogic terminology, indicating that communion with the ultimate in a state of selflessness may lead to spiritual accomplishment. Ajneya picks up this cultural reference to project his idea about the creative process. In his translation of this poem with the help of Professor Leonard E. Nathan the corresponding terms 'whose robe a rug,' 'whose home was a cave in the hills', 'irresistible vow', 'disciplined devotion', could not project the culture-bound meanings which reside in our unconscious.

In the same way "mein kanfata hun; heta hun"– a line of a poem "Mein Tum Logo Se Dur Hun" is translated as "I am the split eared, the underground wretch" by Vishnu khare which cannot express the philosophical meaning of *kanfata* and *heta* of our cultural milieu and as a result the cross-cultural communication does not take place properly.

Another example can be given from the translation of Kalidasa's *Abhijnana Sakuntalam* by William Jones. Jones' Victorian morality was responsible according to Romila Thaper in deleting or toning down many passages, which was according to him erotic and hence immoral and linked to the primitive.[10]

In fact, this kind of an attitude towards a text like *Sakuntala*, announced the birth of Orientalism, which tried to colonize the oriental texts and define and comprehend the culture of the colonized in European terms. Thus, the colonized are viewed as civilized, but their civilisation may take some unpalatable forms, and these can be corrected or deleted.

[10] Romila Thapar, *Shakuntala: Texts, Readings, Histories*, p. 213.

Jones colonized the text in an effort to resolve his individual aesthetic crisis – a crisis that for an Indian was totally absurd. More importantly, Jones' prejudices were responsible for the mistranslation of several passages of *Sakuntala* to impose a value judgment and tie *Sakuntala* to a vision of etiquette which was wholly western and according to European societal norms. As a result, his work presents a tendentious vision of India and in the process consistently fails to recognize Kalidasa's humour, puns, irony and certain cultural nuances. This can be termed as the "resistency" method (Venuti's term) which highlights the ideological dominance of the translator.

It will be interesting to note that Tejaswini Niranjana in her book *Siting Translation: History, Post-structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (1992) expresses the same view that translation as a practice shapes, and takes shape within, the asymmetrical relations of power that operate under colonialism. Moreover, she presents an image of post-colonial as "still scored through by an absentee colonialism." And while referring to the translations of Kannada *vacanas*, she attacks the existing translations including the translations done by A.K. Ramanujan as "attempting to assimilate Saivite poetry to the discourses of Christianity or of a post-Romantic New Criticism" almost analogous to nineteenth century native responses to colonialism.[11]

We all know that no language can exist unless it is steeped in the context of culture; so the exact translation can only be a hypothesis. Translation is always done for a unilingual readership bound by its own cultural properties. It means that any discourse in the SL and its translation in TL, should be accepted as two sets of possible worlds having a "dynamic equivalence" (Nida). The question of equivalence is related to meaning, to be precise, pragmatic meaning.[12] "Equivalent" does not mean identical: the response can never be identical because of different cultural, historical, and situational settings. So, it is always necessary to aim at equivalence of pragmatic meaning, if necessary, at the expense of semantic equivalence.

Pragmatics relates to the correlation between linguistic units and the user(s) of these units in a given communicative situation. We may therefore consider translation to be primarily a pragmatic reconstruction of its source text. Only then does cross-cultural communication become feasible. But this can raise many serious issues; the most important issue is that by accepting meaning as pragmatic meaning the focus of attention shifts from the cultural patterns of the source-language message to the reaction of the receptor-translator of that message.

[11] Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-structuralism, and the Colonial Context*, p.180, 1992.
[12] In *A Model for Translation Quality Assessment*, p. 49, Juliana House says that translation is to be considered primarily as a pragmatic reconstruction of its source text. Pragmatic meaning relates to the correlation between linguistic units and the user(s) of these units in a given communicative situation, i.e., "the communicative value an expression…. over and above its purely conceptual content." (Leach Semantics), (1974), pp27-28

In this context, one may refer to two translations—one in Bengali and the other in Hindi—of T.S. Eliot's famous poems "Ash Wednesday" and "Gerontion". The original passage of the "Gerontion" is as follows:

In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering Judas,

To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk

Among whispers; by Mr. Silvero

With caressing hands, at Limoges

Who walked all night in the next room;

By Hakagawa, bowing among the Titians;

By Madam Tornquist, in the dark room

Shifting the candles; Fraulein Von Kulp

Who turned in the hall, one hand in the door.

In the Hindi translation by Vishnu Khare the "formal correspondence" method is used which seeks to produce a counterpart in the receptor language whose form corresponds to the original as nearly as possible:

*Kalushit mai, dagwood tatha akhrot ke per,*

*Phulte huey judas briksha ke samay,*

*Phusphusaton me khaye, bante, piye jane ke liye,*

*Limoges men dularte,*

*Hatowale Mister Silvaro dwara/*

*Jo dusre kamre men sari raat tahalte rahe;*

*Titian ke kritiyon ke bich jukte huey hakagawa dwara/ andhiare kamren me*

*Mombattiyan sarkti hui/ Madam de Tornquist*

*Dwara/ Fraulein Von Kulp dwara,*

*Jo dwar pur ek hath rakh bhavan me aae*

This formal correspondence method in translation does not require the reader to understand the cultural patterns of the source-language context to comprehend the message and seeks to produce a counterpart in a receptor language whose form corresponds to the original. As a result, the effect of this method on the reader can be sometimes unnatural or otherwise tiring.

Vishnu Dey in his Bengali translation transforms all these terms of a different culture into Indian/Bengali terms, particularly which are familiar with the unilingual Bengali readership. As a result, the depraved May turns into *pacha bhaddro*, Dogwood, Chestnut, flowering Judas into *kochushak, kalojam, mohini dhatura*.

The title of the poem "Gerontion" in Hindi is same written only in Devanagari script whereas in Bengali Vishnu Dey translates it as "Jarayan" which immediately communicates the meaning to a Bengali reader. Besides, some of the names of persons and places which occur in the poem like Brussels, London, Mr Silvero, Madame de Taranquist, Fraulin Von Kulp are exactly reproduced in the Hindi version whereas in the Bengali version Brussels and in London are changed to Kanpur, Kolkatai (in Calcutta); and Mr Silvero, Madam de Taranquist, Fraulin Von Kulp become Hatilal Mehta, Lady Mukherjee, and Mister Tarafdar.

The title of the poem "Ash Wednesday" is reproduced in Devanagari script. The question is how can a reader in Hindi without special knowledge understand "Ash Wednesday," that it is the first day of Lent in the Roman Catholic, Anglican and some other churches? It is so named from the ceremonial use of ashes as a symbol of penitence in the service for the day. To cover the cultural gap, Bishnu Dey in Bengali transforms the title into "Charaker Gaan", a similar kind of religious ceremony of Bengal of ushering in the new by discarding the old.

In Hindi translation, the 'juniper tree', 'she honours the Virgin in meditation', 'blue of Mary's colour,' 'hawthorn blossoms' and 'the May time' of "Ash Wednesday" are turned into 'juniper briksha', 'dhyan me virgin ka adar karti hain', 'neel Mery ka vastra pahane', 'bakain ke phool' and 'Mai ke samay' whereas in Bengali translation Vishnu Dey instead of formal correspondence method uses the method of dynamic equivalence and does not attempt to fill the cultural gap, rather makes the difference between the cultures as clear as possible and turns juniper tree into jayatri briksha, Virgin Mary into Devaki mata, the month of May into phalguni, hawthorn blossoms into atasi puspa and Christ the tiger into Krishna narasimha.

Here, by matching the communicative value of the source text with the communicative value of the target text the pragmatic meaning of both the texts are complemented and in Popovic's term[13] the invariant core is not lost, and the "proper" result is achieved and that makes us feel inclined to believe that only in this way the process of communication becomes meaningful. Here a major question is raised and that is, can a cross-cultural reference be reduced to such a level where the very idea of reading translations in order to enjoy foreign literature with its cultural contexts becomes redundant?

Scholars who favour the adaptations of alien cultural terms raise a *vivad* (controversy) by arguing that in interlingual communication, the link is the translator who is both the receptor of the original message and the source of the secondary message. Both these messages are embedded in their particular cultural frame and as a result in cross cultural communication there are interferences which signify difficulties that concern both the translator and the translation process and as such this *vivadi* group contends that once the translator is freed from his role as an objective mediator and keeps his receptor in mind and foresees their possible reactions, conditioned by the presuppositions and behaviour patterns

[13] A. Popovic, *A Dictionary for the Analysis of Literary Translation* (1976).

of their culture, only then does literary translation become possible. It is therefore stressed by the *vivadi* group that to understand a discourse bound by an alien culture translation need not be a linguistically clear reproduction of the source text but should provide minimum information about the thought patterns and the values of the source culture. This is the reason why adaptations, as done by Vishnu Dey, are essential in cross-cultural communication but these must be minimal with an eye at equivalence of pragmatic meaning. It has also been argued that cultural differences and gaps could be filled with footnotes. However, the use of footnotes would unreasonably divide the source text into two parts, target text and footnotes, and this would disturb the autonomy of the source text and spoil the appeal of the source text.

Scholars of the *prativadi* or the opposite group in the *vivad* contend that while conveying the core meaning through the target text the translator should not forget that the source text in its totality manifests the core meaning and Vishnu Dey transforms this invariant core by Indianising the cultural references. It is very difficult to touch the core. We learn from touching it. Only by touching it we can know how profound it is and only then would we be able to bridge the distance between the cultures. Vishnu Dey does not allow us to do that.

The job of a translator is to turn strangeness into likeness and in the process the strangeness of the original becomes more vivid but the vividness itself liberates us from the cultural prison and gives us the taste of another culture. It is almost like providing a vantage point from where the reader looks at another culture and feels encouraged to understand it.

To sum up, the chief concerns of the translator in translating cultures are the text itself and the translation of culture-bound terms. Nord terms these 'culturemes'[14] or 'cultural categories' which cover a wide array of semantic fields, from geography and traditions to institutions and technologies.

Scholars since Vinay and Darvelnet[15] have suggested several of strategies to compensate for the lack of cultureme equivalence. All these strategies are only testimonies of what has been said already in the presentation of the debate between *vivadi* and *prativadi* groups. Kwiecinski has summarised these into four groups:[16]

i) **Exoticising procedures**: This procedure offers local colour and atmosphere or foreign terms into the target languages like burka used by Muslim ladies.

ii) **Rich explicatory procedures**: The aim is to slide in an extra term or two which will cue readers to enough of the context, often through a local analogy, to guide them towards a more equivalent cognition. When where and how to explicate depends on the translator's acute sensitivity to reader uptake.

[14] Culturemes are formalized, socially and juridically embedded phenomena that exist in a particular form of function in one of the two cultures being compared, Nord, C., *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalists Approaches Explained*, 1997.

[15] Vinay, J.P. and J. Darbelnet, "A Methodology for Translation" in L. Venuti (ed.), *The Translation Studies Reader*, 2004 (2000).

[16] Kwiecinski. P. *Disturbing Strangeness*, 2001.

iii) **Recognised exoticism**: Some well-known geographical and personal names and titles have 'accepted translations,' e.g., Ge`neve in Swiss is now well known as Geneva in translation but one will always need to check how recognised the exoticism is.

iv) **Assimilative procedures:** These procedures transform the text from the original into close functionally equivalent target terms, or it is even deleted if not considered integral.

In other words, the *vivad* between domestication and foreignization or what Venuti says the ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target language cultural values and the ethnodeviant pressure on target language cultural values to register the linguistic and the cultural differences of the foreign text can be solved by using the middle path as mentioned in the sum total of four strategies of translation. This helps in the cultivation of a varied and 'heterogeneous discourse' where foreignization remains embedded in the domesticity of the target text.

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