

## **Translation, a Bridge for Cultural Hybridity in a Globalized Literary World**

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**Abstract:** *Language and culture are interdisciplinary and complimentary to each other. We live in 21<sup>st</sup> century that emphasizes shrinking the world into a small global village that thrusts the crucial role of language as a medium of expression and communication. Though translation is as old as human civilization, it has become a necessity in every sphere of life especially literature. Besides, internationally and nationally, the role of translation is immense in creating a ripple in every walk of life. To substantiate my argument I have chosen a very few writers from a crowd of translators and authors. To be precise, the Brazilian writer, Paulo Coelho, the French author, Victor Hugo, Columbian writer, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Indian Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore and author translator like O. V Vijayan, renowned Malayalam writer like Basheer who have created their own space in literature through translation globally. Thus my attempt is to explore if translation is still a secondary activity? Or has it become a tool for promoting cultural integrity and in enriching literature disseminating ideas worldwide? Or has it got a vital role in postcolonial scenario?*

**Keywords:** *Translation, Globalisation, Postcolonial context, Secondary activity, Cultural bridging*

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### **I. TRANSLATION, A BRIDGE FOR CULTURAL HYBRIDITY IN A GLOBALIZED LITERARY WORLD**

One day a mother mouse and a baby mouse were walking out. Suddenly a cat made its appearance and was about to pounce upon them. The mother said, "Bow - Wow". The cat got frightened and took to its heels. The mother then turned to the baby and said, "See the advantage of knowing an extra language." Mastering an extra language has got many advantages for sure but everybody cannot have that privilege and this paves the way for translation which is essential and has become a necessity in the present scenario.

Literally, translation is the process of transference of meaning from source language to the target language. In fact, it is not a mere linguistic activity but involves many other factors too. The practice of translation is as old as human civilization because our thoughts in abstract form are in its original state. When we transform our thoughts to action it gets translated - be it articulation or written form or symbolic representation. Hence, everything we undergo in our life is in a way or the other translation in microscopic or in macroscopic form.

Edward Sapir claims that 'language is a guide to social reality' and that human beings are at the mercy of the language that has become the medium of expression for their existence in their society. Familiarity and understanding among the people are largely determined by the language habits of the community he/she belongs to and each separate structure represents a separate reality:

“No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached.”

Sapir's thesis reinforced the fact that no language can exist unless it is fused in the context of culture and no culture survives with language at its heart. Thus if we detach language from its context, loss in meaning is certain. This ensures that the role of translator is very significant as he brings the writers and readers of one nation into contact with those of others in all fields like literature, law, science, medicine, philosophy, political science etc. This intermingling, in turn, leads to nation- building and is pertinent for developing countries whose contributions remained disregarded due to the lack of opportunities for wide distribution of translated works.

Besides, the scores of volumes of translated literature possessed by a nation is an index of the nation's escalation and literature empowers and enriches the homeland. The translator is a facilitator who makes available openings for diverse and far-flung cultures to come together and thereby network on a more affable clutch. So it is absurd to regard translation as an inferior activity that requires no originality on the part of the translator.

Translation was identified as a serious process that has something to do with the culture. While translating a work of art, the translator performs the task of cultural diffusion. For this reason translation is indisputably a serious task that demands craft and original thought. Translation is not just the reproduction of an author's thought into some other language for the translator holds the responsibility to present the original work of art appealingly, providing the same effect it had on the readers of source language. To serve this purpose, the best way is to use 'sense for sense' method. As Cicero says, "If I render word for word, the result will sound uncouth and if compelled by necessity I alter anything in order or wording, I shall seem to have departed from the function of a translator". Accordingly, to achieve the desired effect of the source text, one should always follow the sense for sense method instead of word for word. The translated work would not serve the true purpose if it fails to contain the cultural aspects. The chief responsibility of a translator is to the target language readers. He should consider their literal taste while translating the original text. Nowadays translation has been viewed variedly as an art, craft and science. Translation has become a vast area of study with several branches of specialization.

The well-known Indian English writer Amitav Ghosh affirms the importance of translated works when he stated thus: "And the thing about translation is that there is no way around it. In a country as multilingual as ours, unless you have really good translations, you are doomed" (Indian Express).

At the international level, translated texts have deeper inference as they are the manifestation of a country's sense of pride in its literary growth. Possibly one of the reasons why English language holds a sway over other languages is that English people translated into their language works from many other languages from a very early period. Consequently, we now depend on English language to have access to world classics written in other languages. Many of our translations (in regional languages) of world classics have been done basing them on their English versions and therein exist the strength of the English language.

Translators, in fact, do a wonderful job for the delight and contentment of the readers worldwide. In a way, he can also be assumed as a conqueror for he conquers another literature and another set of people. Ideal or perfect translation is a distant dream, but good translators are constantly in search of modes to better their power of expression. They have often realized that every language is complete in itself and not inferior to other languages. Octavio Paz summed up in his short work on translation that all texts being part of a literary system descended from and related to other systems are 'translations of translation of translations':

"Every text is unique and, at the same time, it is the translation of another text. No text is entirely original because language itself, in its essence, is already a translation: firstly, of the non-verbal world and secondly, since every sign and every phrase is the translation of another sign and another phrase. However, this argument can be turned around without losing any of its validity: all texts are original because every translation is distinctive. Every translation, up to a certain point, is an invention and as such constitutes a unique text."

Translation attained a new role as Christianity spread across the world. Bible translations which were aimed at increasing the patronage of Christianity had also acquired new dimensions with the emergence of Reformation and growth of pride in national cultures. Attempts had been made by the Christian missionaries to translate the New Testament and as a result many translations were made. One version that greatly influenced the succeeding generations was written by St. Jerome. The complete Bible was translated in to English by John Wycliffe between 1380 and 1384. This marked a new phase in the history of translation as the piteous approach towards translation changed in popular literary circles.

With the invention of printing in the 15th century, translation attained more prominence as it was taken more seriously and attempts were made to formulate a theory of translation as well. The task of translation and the chore of learning itself changed along with the changing concepts of culture and society grounded by the new scientific discoveries of due importance.

In the last decades of the 20th century, translation studies came to be established as a discipline that contains its own contour and is extensively connected with other branches of knowledge like psychology, philosophy, anthropology, literary studies and cultural history. Approaches to translation underwent tremendous

changes. That is, it is not seen as a mere linguistic process but rather as a process that entwines different cultures. Without translation world literature would not have enjoyed the premium status it's been given now. During the infancy of translation activity in literary world, it was considered as a secondary job that demanded nothing from the translator, in which he merely follows the style of author and contributes nothing to the work. Furthermore a major population of the patrons of classic literature did not encourage the translation process in literature since they believed that the text will lose its "essence" if translated.

Translation is not a process of high-level linguists, but a cultural activity in which the translator has to reproduce and relocate the original author's idea to a different culture without losing the essence of the text. Only thus translation serves its true purpose. As we all know, every literary text springs from a culture and is written in a language that is to some extent conditioned by that culture. According to theoreticians Itamar Even-Sohar, James Holmes, Gideon Toury and Vladimir Ivir, the phenomenon of translation is subject to various kinds of pressure and 'culture' exercises the maximum pressure of all. We can summarise their ideas thus:

“Translation is a means of communication between people belonging to two or more cultures. What is being translated in the process is 'culture' and not 'language' and such studies relating to translations should have 'culture' as its focus.”

Eventually, a translator stands in between different languages, cultures, and value systems and when he creates the new work through translation he invariably brings in cultural shift. We live in 21st century, an era that demands cultural exchange in a process of international co-operation and national integration reducing the distance between people and nation with the advancements in science and technology. The dynamic changes in linguistics and literature in this century even more reinforced the superiority of translation in literary circles. Every versatile writer of their culture became an iconic figure in world literature as well. For instance, the works of Brazilian writer Paulo Coelho have gathered wide readership across the world with translation. He is conferred with the status of Guinness World Record for being the most translated living author. His work, *Alchemist* has been translated into eighty languages creating a world record. Had that not been possible through translation, no one would know a versatile author like him residing in Brazil. Eminent writers like Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Victor Hugo attained gigantic readership across the world through translation. If not translated, their works would have gone unnoticed globally. Marquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera* and Hugo's *Les Miserables* still remain as some of the bestselling books in Kerala apart from its global acclaim. Moreover, Paulo Coelho's titles have been in the book shelves of prolific readers across the world. So is the case with many eminent scholars worldwide. Here, I'm concentrating on a very few writers to make my argument precise.

Like globalization made us familiar with the products around the world, translation has brought various cultures into our reading room. English holds the superiority over other languages mainly because it's the only language to which every acclaimed work has been translated to. As a result, we now depend on English language to have access to world classics written in other languages. In this sense, translation provides the reader with a wide knowledge of world literature. With the emergence of new technology, the process of translation has become a part of world literature and it now enjoys a place of its own in global literary circles. Apart from literature, translation has been widely seen in business world too. Even the description of nutritional facts on the tin of an energy drink contains translated text. Corporate companies even developed the practise of hiring trained translators for promoting their business, especially while projecting their image in popular media.

A vital factor which contributed to the widespread growth of translation is globalization as it not only unified the world, but also cultures. One pillar of the foundation upon which globalization chiefly rests is cultural diffusion, which is only possible through translation. In a vast sub-continent like India with almost 15 major regional languages, each proud of its distinct culture and tradition-and countless dialects the role of translation is immense. As commented by Bassnett rightly, Translation Studies is losing its European focus and rapidly developing in India, China, Arab countries, Latin America and in Africa. For a country like India the vital role of translator is in nation building through bridging gaps. In a multilingual country like India translations of different kinds are published every year- from one regional language into another, from one regional language into a foreign language especially English and from a foreign language into a regional language.

A typical example is Rabindranath Tagore became the first Indian to receive Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913 and was recognised as a versatile genius by the world through the translation of *Gitanjali* which was written originally in Bengali. Vaikom Mohammed Basheer, one of the prominent authors in Malayalam received wide critical acclaim through translation of his works like *Pathumma's Goat* into English by E R Asher. His works have been translated into English as a part of UN's effort to introduce popular literature of

various cultures to the world. Cultural significance of the original work should be perceived by the target language readers while reading a translated text. Writers like Basheer who uses a number of culture specific terms or dialect have always been a challenge for even the most qualified translators. Undeniably, O V Vijayan himself translated his works in Malayalam like '*Kazhakinte Ithihasam*' as *Legend of Kazak* creating a wave in literature.

As has been noted the status of translated works are on its progress in this postcolonial scenario. The horizon of translation is widening every hour with the emergence of new media. Today acclaimed authors like Paulo Coelho, who originally writes in Portuguese, even update Facebook status using English, gathering the support of translation. The French writer Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*, translated into Malayalam as *Paavangal* took the love of readers and has been one of the best in their collection. The Columbian writer Marquez popularly known as 'Gabo' live in the heart of literature lovers as he took them to the world of magic realism. A literature or work of art that originally emerges from an indigenous setting or culture may acquire global recognition through translation. The increasing importance of translation has led to the elevation of the status of translators like Margaret Jull Costa, Asher, Nalappat Narayana Menon and so on.

In short, cultural bridging is very important today since widespread discrimination in the name of ethnicity is common everywhere. Translation plays an important role in bridging cultures of various countries. It has become a form of communication, a channel for the circulation of ideas and opinion, information and influence. The translator's job is of more seriousness as he has to think and act globally and be instrumental in building up a strong network among different societies and different cultures. Thus, translation is no more a secondary activity rather a job of high profile entrusted with the responsibility of pleasing millions of readers worldwide.

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