

The Significance of Global Cultural-Translation in Samskara

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ABSTRACT: *The present paper deals with cultural challenges encountered by the translator in India while rendering indigenous work of art into English. How effectively a trained and competent translator like Ramanujan was able to reach Samskara of U.R.Anantmurthy to western audience is discussed. Samskara is U.R.Anantmurthy's masterpiece and is considered as a classic in Indian literature. It was written and published in 1965 and was translated by a renowned translator A.K Ramanujan in 1976. Its fame soon crossed the linguistic barriers with its English translation and that continued with the translation of the novel into many languages with steadily growing interest. In real sense the powerful journey of Samskara began in its rendered form. Ramanujan worked as a professor of English at university of Chicago from 1960's till his death in 1993. His language had a natural flow that suited the western literary circle. Thus Samskara has prospect of being a very imperative part of western critical cannon which is prescribed as a textbook in several universities. How the translator tackled the cultural issues like language, cultural anthropology, humour, mythology, architecture, literature, food habits, dressing habits and music is discussed. Why other translations of great writers of India who have more competence have fallen on the deaf ears of western critical circle is a poignant question today. Do we require a competent translator like Ramanujan today? Is it necessary for India to make translation discipline more professional?*

KEY WORDS: *cultural challenge, render, indigenous work, translation discipline, competent translator.*

I. INTRODUCTION

One cannot dismiss the fact that the task of translator is greater than the original writer because he has to render it for the wider world readership with his competency over two languages. He cannot take up the leniency of changing the plot and structure or distort any part of communication. Moreover he has to take care of two readers- *English Readers that is non-native* and *Readers in English that is native readers*. In this regard the role played by Ramanujan as translator is amazing. Ramanujan writes, "*I have tried to make the translation self-contained, faithful yet readable, but the best in this kind are but shadows; and the worst are no worse, if imagination amends them. A translator hopes not only to translate a text, but hopes to translate a non-native reader into a native one*". (Ramanujan 1) At the outset he had to encounter two major challenges of this novel. The novel, soon after its publication became the centre of controversy for attacking upper caste agrahara situated in tiny hamlet called Durvaspur in Western Ghats of south India. Ananthamurthy was labeled as anti-brahminical who attacks superstitions and hypocrisies of his own orthodox community in which he was grown up. Secondly the novel is based on Hindu philosophy full of mythic symbolism with more number of sanskritised words. Ramanujan attempted to correct the first view to some extent. He tried to provide the right perspective to approach the novel. He called it '*an allegory rich in realistic detail*' in the Translator's note and further explained in the Afterword: "*As in an early Bergman film, the characters are frankly allegorical, but the setting is realistic. An abstract human theme is reincarnated in just enough particular of a space, a time, a society*" (Ramanujan 144-45).

'*Samskara, A rite for a dead man*' is a story of a religious crisis in an upper caste community which later becomes a story of a learned man's existential crisis. Durvaspur was famous for two eminent Brahmin personalities staying there. One of them was the protagonist Praneshacharya and other one was Narayanappa. Praneshacharya was local guru who had been to Benaras for studying and returned with the title '*Crest-Jewel of Vedic Learning*'. He was known far and wide for his command over the Vedic scriptures. He lived a life of penance and discipline. He had married invalid crippled woman to achieve salvation and was totally devoted to knowledge without any selfish motives. The other character Narayanappa lived in the same agrahara but had rejected brahminhood by keeping Chandri, a prostitute as his wife. He had flaunted his rebelliousness with remarkable acts like drinking alcohol sitting in his front veranda, eating meat and had thrown saligrama, a holy stone into the river. He had cooked sacred fish from the temple tank and had eaten them. He had also corrupted the youth of agrahara. Such man went to a town far away, returned with high fever and died within couple of days.

The novel begins with the death of Narayanappa, who died childless leaving no heir to perform the last death rites. The question was raised in Agrahara, 'Was Narayanappa who protested against every rule of Brahmanism, a true Brahmin? Who should risk their life to perform the last rites of Narayanappa?' The questions remained unanswered. People in Agrahara tried to bring solution with the help of their leader Praneshacharya. Praneshacharya attempted to hunt an answer in the Vedic text, whereas other people in agrahara indulged in misinterpretation of shastras. The body of Narayanappa began rotting in hut and "according to ancient custom, until the body is properly removed there can be no worship, no bathing, no prayer, no food nothing". (p 12) Praneshacharya had failed to resolve the dilemma despite having the best knowledge. He prayed God for the solution but divine intervention never happened. He was tired, hungry and had no answer for Chandri's plight. His penance was shaken when his body and mind took refuge in Chandri's arms. Being ashamed of his acts Praneshacharya runs away from the scene after cremating his wife. The epidemic killed most of the people in Agrahara including his invalid wife. Chandri proved to be more enterprising by cremating Narayanappa with the help of muslim. The novel ends but doesn't answer many questions that was thrown in the earlier part of the novel. The rendering of such novel based on the community, which had a routine life following the rules of ancient mythology, Vedas, Shastras and believing that the curse would fall upon them if they go against them, is definitively a great challenge for the translator even a competent translator like Ramanujan. Here is an attempt to go through some cultural factors like language, cultural anthropology, humour, mythology, architecture, literature, food habits, dressing habits and music which pose as a problem in translation process.

II. LANGUAGE:

When one looks into cultural challenges of translation, the main obscurity occurs in language. The indomitable character Praneshacharya has proficiency in Vedic studies. His communication is heavy with sanskritised words. The reader feels towering personality and his virtuous behavior by his pious words. This cannot meet the expectation of reader in English Translation as the language used is same for all the characters whether it is Narayanappa, a sharp tongued outcaste Brahmin or low born prostitute Chandri. The idiolect of Praneshacharya is difficult to produce in English. The Sanskrit words in the novel are retained but the translator has given a large note on every word. This may be a shortcoming while reading the novel. Yet a detailed note has helped a native and a non-native reader to feel an Indian atmosphere. The translator has invented an ingenious solution by adding *notes* and *afterword* to his translation of Samskara. The rich vocabulary of original novel provides layers of meaning even for common words which is understood easily by the reader who belongs to the region.

The title *Samskara* itself has many stratum of meaning. It means culture, ritual and refinement, power of memory, sacred consecration, purificatory rite and funeral obsequies. The translator had to give the meaning as 'a rite for a dead man'. Some words fail to give connotative meaning like *Panchamrit*(five fold nectar), *aposhana*(consecrated water), *saligram*(holy stone), *ekadashi*(eleventh day of the moon), *mangalsutra*(wedding-string) *mangalarati*(flaming camphor), a conventional widowhood etc. The problem of equivalence occurs in translating mantras. Thus language always develops in tune with the cultural milieu of a particular region. Even when one observes the structure of Kannada language, one wonders at the sort of freedom of occurrence of various items in a sentence. The subject, object, verb, adverb and clauses can occur in any order of a sentence. But in English the subject is placed at the beginning. The word order is usually subject, verb and object. To overcome these difficulties the translator like Ramanujan must have had a real ingenuity.

Humour: Humour is a part of culture of the land. This is one of the major reasons for the loss of meaning in translation. There is a serious death note in the entire novel yet there springs a humour between the dialogues of Praneshacharya and Narayanappa regarding mythical characters. The writer questions the taboos and tensions of his upper caste characters. In the original there is a certain involvement and participation of writer and the readers because they share the same tradition, politics, social attitudes, literature and a certain way of life. The reference of freedom movement and the name of political parties often occur in the novel which is rather ironically mentioned bringing a smile on the lips of native reader.

Cultural Anthropology: Another important factor in the novel is cultural-anthropology where man is born and brought up in a particular cultural atmosphere, which moulds his ways, habits, thoughts and his stipulated life-style. Though it is believed that the human nature is same everywhere, most of the time human nature is moulded, evolved according to one's own bringing up, the influence of childhood and the kind of school he gets. Some accept unquestioningly the norms of the society like Praneshacharya and others like Narayanappa where there is adverse effect of his bringing up, reject every rule, custom and tradition because in his opinion the words are nauseating in modern times. The novelist probes deep into the psychology of his characters but the

western reader may not be able to get the rebellious attitude of Narayanappa. The attachment of Indian woman to her parental home often creeps up in the novel which may not sound very intense in translation.

Kinship Terms: The terminology what an Indian uses for relationships is vague and beyond the imagination of any foreign reader. The general terms are not preferred in India. The words like *so:daramava*, *chikkappa*, *doddappa* are not merely words but they assign a kind of responsibility to characters. *So:daramava* is next to father. Most of the terms are respectable terms given to the elders. Elders are not addressed by names as in western culture. They are addressed as 'Avaru' and not 'Avanu'. A guru like Praneshacharya is addressed as 'Avaru' and Narayanappa, an outcaste is addressed as 'Avanu.' Even people in the society respect each other by calling 'avva'(mother), appa(father), anna(brother) or akka(sister).

III. MYTHOLOGY:

Mythology occupies a greater part of novel. The names of sages are often referred in the conversation. Narayannappa a sharp tongued anti-hero of the novel tells in anger, "Quite a lusty lot those sages. What was the name of the fellow who ravished the fisherwoman smelling of fish, right in the boat and gave her body a permanent perfume? And now, look at these poor Brahmins, descended from such sages! Let's see who wins in the end—you or me. I'll destroy Brahmanism. I certainly will. My only sorrow is that there's no Brahmanism really left to destroy in this place---except you."(p 23) The creative writer mentions mythological characters of his land in his novel to make his characters more authentic and he need not give any explanation to his readers about mythological characters. A mythological word like *Hari* has cultural connotative meaning. It has several meaning like flow, horse, and name of God, tearing the page, tearing a cloth etc. The meaning is realized only in the context by the native reader.

The problem of food habits and dressing habits: Food is an important part of every culture. Food prepared at different occasions, festivals, marriages signify one's status, concern for the guests or retaining traditions and following the path of forefathers. The novel mentions the stipulated food item of the region that is rice and 'curry, uppittu, dose, chutney' etc. the vocabulary gives the meaning for *Saru* as 'a well seasoned sauce regularly eaten with rice', *Uppittu* as salted dish made out of cream of wheat, rice, etc. Regarding dressing habits words like 'Sar'i or dhoti may not have complicated meanings but words like half 'Sari', red 'Sari' on the shaven head of widow might confuse the foreign reader.

IV. CONCLUSION;

It is important to note that despite cultural translation problems, the translated form of *Samskara* was successful in capturing the attention of western reader. The credit totally goes to A.K. Ramanujan. One more mention worthy important writer S.L.Bhyrappa has twenty-two chief popular novels to his credit. His *Vamshavriksha* was published just a year before *Samskara*. But the translation took place after thirty years which was unable to reach western critical circle. The translation of *Samskara* had hardly a decade difference. Ramanujan stayed in a place like Chicago where it wasn't difficult to get it published by an international publisher with the help of English friends as proof readers. The question today is how to get recognition for the significant writers of indigenous literature in the western literary circle? In this context a realization is that there is an urgent need to place vernacular languages on the world map through translations in English.

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