

## An Introduction to Umashankar Joshi as a Critic in English Translation

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### Abstract

Umashankar Joshi was a force of Gandhi era and thus, his creative and critical insights must be seen and appraised in the context of Gandhi era. Joshi identified himself as a worshipper of words. He has influenced the generations of Pandit era, Gandhi era and Post-Gandhi era. His writings bear historical and critical significance in the contexts of Gujarati literature, Indian literature and also Western literature. Joshi was mainly celebrated as a poet as he started his career with poetry in 1928 which he continued to pursue till his death, but he has also contributed in the field of other genres such as, short stories, essays, one-act plays, travel literatures, translation and criticism among others. The variety of subjects and his ingenious critical insight not only invite translational deliberations for Joshi's writings, but they also pose questions of nature of and methods for translation. As major part of Joshi's criticism is a part of lectures delivered as radio talk, key-note address to seminars or in a letter form, the language remains informal and cause strategic deviation in his register, tenor, content and execution in sync with nature of his discourse (philosophical, formalistic study, practical criticism, etc.). Translating This paper intends to study perspectives of translation on critical writings of Umashankar Joshi in terms of theory and practice.

**Key Words:** Criticism, Practical Criticism, Translation, Umashankar Joshi, Indian Literature, Western Literature

### Introduction:

Umashankar Joshi, fondly known as 'Vasuki' or 'Shravana' is majorly celebrated as a poet, but his contribution in the field of criticism cannot be neglected. His identity as poet is not enough. He was a Poet-Critic. He has published more than fourteen anthologies of criticism. He has given his insights into literature through his critical essays. His critical faculty was as sharp and subtle as the creative one. He belonged to Gandhi era. Kanaiyalal Munshi, Ramnarayan Pathak, Nagindas Parekh, Snehrashmi were his contemporaries and they contributed significantly to the field of Gujarati literary criticism. They were highly influenced by Gandhiji's thinking and the same can be seen in their works. Umashankar Joshi seems to be more inclined towards practical criticism rather than theories of criticism unlike others and that is why major part of his criticism is about different authors and their works in Gujarati, Indian and Western literatures. Gujarati literature and criticism underwent a drastic transformation with the advent of Umashankar Joshi. His writings are the raw material with which this transformation took place.

**Umashankar Joshi's Criticism:**

Translating Umashankar Joshi's critical compilation is a challenging task. The reason being the language he used is rich as well as urbane at the same time. In terms of challenges, the critical thought rooted in the tradition of its own which is Gujarati, also experiences the encounter with other traditions and imbibes ideas from them. Hence, it is vital on the part of a translator to be acquainted with the critical thought of not only the language from which he chooses to translate but also the other traditions which influenced it.

Umashankar Joshi entered into the field of criticism with an article: 'Poetry and Philosophy: A Viewpoint' (*Kavya ane Tattvgyan : Ek Drashtibindu*). He should not be celebrated as a poet only but as a poet-critic. Joshi had the power of relishing word. He looked for its development; and therefore, he presented the art of using word in a new way. Thus, his power of relishing word presents a powerful force for development of his literary creativity. This power is also a reason for his successful criticism.

As said earlier, Umashankar Joshi seems to be inclined more towards practical criticism than theories of literature. According to him, "Critic's main job is that of practical criticism." He has contributed to all the three fields of criticism – philosophy, formalism and creative/artistic criticism. In his criticism, he has discussed various types of literature – essay, one-act play, play, short story, sonnet, narratives, folklore, etc.

T. S. Eliot seems to be a favorite poet-critic of Umashankar Joshi. Both of them have some similarities in their literary genius. They both are well-wishers – thinker of culture, both are persistent of discipline in poetry, both are prodigy and constantly developing, in both of them communion of religions and dignity can be found. Joshi has critiqued the most about modern Gujarati literary types and literature. In criticism also, he has been biased towards poetry, particularly. He is not only a poet-critic but majorly a poetry-critic. He happened to speak more about poetry and in literary criticism he has much written about poetry only.

Apart from two works of author-study '*Akho: Ek Adhyayan*' (1949) and '*Shakespeare*' (1964), he has given eight collection of critical articles covering a wide range of topics pertaining to principles of literary criticism, literary forms, literary taste, books, authors, problems of writing, etc. If one would divide the articles of Joshi, it can be said that there are fifteen to sixteen theoretical articles, about ten articles on literary forms, ten articles on history of literature, ninety to ninety-five articles about Gujarati literature-authors, eighteen articles about Indian literature and eight articles about western literature. Pens dealing with such a wide range are few in Gujarati literature. His observations extend to literatures of other languages also. His experience as a creative writer adds to a new dimension to his critical essays. Some of them are disciplined studies while others are written in the vein of personal essays. Lectures delivered in seminars, conferences, and workshops held in Gujarat and various parts of India on various occasions reflect Umashankar Joshi's sound knowledge, wide erudition, broad vision, clarity and originality of thought, intensive study, first-hand information of the subject and finally, modest but firm conclusion expressed in a simple but urbane style.

Umashankar Joshi's literary philosophy has been nourished by the works of great Indian-Western authors like Vyas, Kalidasa, Bhavbhooti, Ravindranath, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Goethe, Tolstoy, Hemingway, Eliot. Also, he had been continuously writing about the predecessor and contemporary Gujarati literature, because he knew very well that one cannot proceed without considering the medieval and contemporary literature of the language in which the theoretical discussion or creative discussion is to be done.

Umashankar's contribution as a literary critic is three-fold: (i) He made the concepts of art, literature and poetry clear and comprehensive. (ii) He established a concrete standard for assessing an author or a piece of literature. (iii) He taught to cultivate aesthetic taste based on the spirit of humanity.

Joshi had a special skill of seeing the critical aspects in larger cultural-literary context. For say, he has a suitable understanding to judge the subject matter of critique. He is protestor of the attitude of realism for the sake of realism. Umashankar Joshi said that criticism is not an art and so critic is not a creator. He didn't consider criticism an art and also not a science. In all of his criticism, the most influential is his practical criticism. When he talks about any literature or evaluated any piece of literature, he doesn't tell what he knew but makes the reader participate in what he has enjoyed or felt.

### **Strategies for Translation**

Translation of critical writing assumes many challenges and a more serious character when it is critical texts that one has to translate, because they differ considerably from literary texts. Critical writing can also be considered creative like others. Acts of interpretation on both types of writing – creative and critical – differ. Translation is not merely a coding and decoding of the language system. It is a sort of communication of its message into the target language. Translation not only involves the translation of a text but also of a culture.

A translation such as one from Gujarati or any Indian language for that matter into English also provides various opportunities as regards widening the horizons of critical thought by contributing to the existing pool of critical knowledge. A translator requires a unique blend of abilities to focus on the translation of critical texts, the difficulties inherent in them, and strategies for overcoming them.

This paper tries to describe strategies for translation the researcher used while translating fifteen essays – including philosophical, formalistic and creative/artistic of Umashankar. Joshi loved to play with words and use words differently. The language of all these essays is a kind of informal as most of the articles were the lectures delivered at various occasions and various places. He was a genius Gandhi era, but he did not remain confined to that only. At some places in essays, he has taken references of Sanskrit literature and further elaborated it in the context of Gujarati literature. So the translator has to first get acquainted with the Sanskrit critical tradition to understand the meaning of his points. He did not directly critique upon a subject, rather he went back to the past tradition of literature and elaborated how that was changed from time to time. He also mentions historical characters so translator has to go through the incidents of history to do justice to the understanding and translating the same things. Some of the terms

which he uses don't have their equivalents in English and hence, a translator needed to retain some words as they were. As the language in original is not formal, translation often seems highly informal and oral in nature and structure because the translator has stuck to the source text in language and structure.

The following are some concerns for translating his critical writing:

- (i) The language is simple yet might seem oral and informal at various places.
- (ii) The content is from Gujarati, Indian as well as Western literature so it includes various cultures and their principles.
- (iii) There are many terms in native language which were to be retained in translation as they were to be interpreted in their source structures.
- (iv) There are some references to historical events, texts, figures, which provide the needful contexts to decode his critical positions.
- (v) The composition is narrative as well as dialogic.
- (vi) There are illustrations, examples, references made to other texts in Sanskrit or Gujarati.
- (vii) Literary movements, -isms, terms from Western poetics interpreted as well as Sanskrit ones. The intention has been to examine the validation of Indian and Western theories and appropriateness of their application on local literary creativity.

Umashankar Joshi's critical writings are an exposition of the nature, function and form of literature which are the most ancient and yet unarguably the most relevant concerns of all the times. Gujarati literary scenario and the critical theories were in dire need of a dose of new ideas and new ways of reading, writing and perceiving literature and criticism. Joshi's critical text should be read as the critique of the literary practices of his times and should be read for anybody who wishes to trace the history of Gujarati literature and criticism.

## Conclusion

Translating some of Umashankar Joshi's critical essays is merely an endeavor to understand the world in which Umashankar Joshi lived and what he thought. It is also an exercise to revisit some of the Indian and Western constructs and re-examine their validity or relevance to our context in times when they seem to rule our academic and intellectual existence. Through translations, perhaps, one may contribute by critically appreciating his works for raising fundamental questions that help us understand literature and criticism from multiple points.

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