

Evolution of Popularity of Pushkin's works in India

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Abstract

For a Russian reader Pushkin has been an exceptional literary figure. Pushkin's enchanting power of prose, poetry and drama equally moves the heart and mind of the reader and provide luminous inspiration. Often revered as Russia's *first national poet* or "*Sun of Russian Poetry*", light of Pushkin has touched the lives of almost all the literature lovers not only in Russia but across the globe. Children of Russia grow up listening to the '*Children Poems*' of the poet. Even in India, the role of Pushkin in the popularity and expansion of Russian literature is immense. His poetry ranges across wide themes from history to creativity, society to subliminal human relationships. Pushkin's verses on the theme of love appealed Indian readers immensely. Beauty, subtlety and spark of emotion along with other aesthetic elements can be easily seen in most of his works. This paper is an attempt to discuss in detail the evolution of popularity of the most celebrated poet of Russia and how his works have been translated in all the widely spoken languages of India.

Keywords: Pushkin, Russian Poetry, Translation, India, Hindi, Indian Languages

Introduction

The Nineteenth Century Russian Critic and writer Vissarion Belinsky emphasizing on the significance and position of Pushkin in Russian Literature said that "*Every educated Russian must have a complete Pushkin, otherwise he has no right to be considered as either educated or Russian*"(Kelly:39)

The glory of Pushkin is widely acknowledged outside Russia especially among the western readers and even in some eastern parts of the world. In the rest part of the world, Pushkin may not be a

household name but scholars studying Russian literature could hardly escape the pervasive presence and magic of Pushkin's Poetry. For many reasons, it is said that *Pushkin is classist in discipline, romantic in personality and realist when it comes to the hold of depiction of realism*. He is also credited with the application of fusion languages like old Slavic languages and vernacular Russian for the very first time in Russian poetry. On top of it, he is one of those very few poets of Russia who extensively wrote in both the genres (poetry and prose) and gained the popularity among readers and earned respect of critics.

Just two years ago, Ekaterina Aleeva in her special article highlighted ten reasons "*why Pushkin is so great*" (Aleeva: 2016). In her article Aleeva reflected upon some of his significant attributes as a poet, writer and as an exceptional personality with unprecedented tone and temperament. It is true that there are various reasons which stand as a testimony to the fact why Pushkin was undoubtedly the greatest poet of Russia whose repute has crossed all physical boundaries.

Pushkin in India

Great Hindi Critic, Namavar Singh, in a preface to an anthology of selected poems of Alexander Pushkin, writes that "*Rich is the man who knows the language of Pushkin*" (Singh: 1988). This above statement by an author of multitudinous books on literary criticism summarises the role and stature of Pushkin in world poetry.

A landmark event happened in 1989 when Sahitya Akademi (New Delhi) celebrated the birth anniversary of Pushkin. The event started with the recitation of the verses of Pushkin. The mighty statue of Pushkin outside its premises bears testimony to that historical event. Ten years later the Centre of Russian Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University (Delhi) in collaboration with Indian Council for Cultural Research (Delhi) on a grand scale celebrated birth centenary of Pushkin. Scholars and *Pushkinists* from India as well as different parts of the world had participated in the conference. On the eve of this event the then Prime Minister and poet Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, referring to the fact that Pushkin has always been a driving force against the authoritarianism and repression and became the voice of the masses. Mr. Vajpayee noted that "*his (Pushkin's) extravagant and colourful personal life was tempered by his conflicts with the authorities who disapproved of his liberal views and his reputation for being an outspoken champion for social radicals*". (Souvenir: 1999)

There have been enough discussions among the literary circles about the untranslatability of poetry

of Pushkin in any other language. Anglo Russian critic D.S.Mirsky emphasizing on the limitations of understanding the poetry of Pushkin by a foreign reader said that “*It is indeed difficult for the foreigner, perhaps impossible if he is ignorant of the language, to believe in the supreme greatness of Pushkin among Russian Writers*” (Kelly: 2001)

It is true also that Pushkin can be best understood in Russian as Tagore in Bengali , Byron in English and Dinkar in Hindi. Also a translation cannot be equivalent to the real literature, but it can reflect the truth of it and introduce a great number of people to the world of literature which would otherwise be inaccessible to them.

Eminent Hindi writer and translator Madan Lal Madhu translated the works of Pushkin in two volumes. In these poetic compilations, Dr. Madhu has included verses on theme of love, nature and that of contemporary issues. In the preface to an anthology of his selected verses the then Ambassador to Russia H.E Satinder Kumar Lamba remarked that *Dr. Madhu, is a poet who knows Indian as well as Russian Poetry very well.* (Madhu: 1999)

Varyam Singh, a professor of Russian literature and translator also published anthology of translation of poetry of Pushkin (Singh: 1999). He has translated more than 90 verses from Russian into Hindi. His anthology of Russian Poetry includes verses like ‘*Prophet*’, ‘*Poet*’, ‘*Poet and crowd*’ etc. (Singh:1988) A few years later his student Kumar Kaustabh, a scholar in Russian literature, published his first anthology on love poems of Pushkin in Hindi. (Kumar: 2000).

The biography of Pushkin in Hindi for Hindi readers was translated by Vallabh Siddharth which was originally written by Henry Troyat in French language. (Troyat: 1970). It has immensely helped the Indian readers to know about the life of the poet and the circumstances under which he has written those masterpieces.

Academics like Gurucharan Singh and Charumati Ramdas have independently translated multiple stories of Pushkin like ‘*The Queen’s Spades*’ ‘*The Egyptian Nights*’ and his famous novel ‘*Duvrovsky*’.

Apart from Hindi, Pushkin has been translated into other major languages of India like Punjabi, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Bengali and others. Karanjeet Singh has translated poetry of Pushkin into Punjabi while Shyamlal Pardeshi and Ghulam Nabi Aatish in Kashmiri. Besides, Amal Dasgupta and Nainy Bhowmick have translated stories of Pushkin in Bengali. In addition to these, there are number of independent scholars working in their respective languages of India have been contributing in the popularity of the readership of Pushkin through the work of translations.

Conclusion

Pushkin is perhaps the sole Russian poet who has been translated into almost all the major Indian languages. It will not be an exaggeration to say that Indian readers now introduced to the literary works of Pushkin as well as his personality. However, it is true that translating Pushkin seems more challenging and in assuming the role of a translator one has to be very prudent and sagacious. In the words of Anil Janvijay, translator and poet, “*it is difficult to translate poetry of Pushkin because of his simple and transparent language. At the first sight his poetry appears to be very simple and understandable, but as far as engaging in translation is concerned they appear far more complicated*” (Janvijay: 2008). Despite these challenges poetry of Pushkin has been translated in India and almost all the widely spoken languages of the world. It is a great work in progress that calls for further endeavour of emerging scholars of Russian literature in order to present the literature of Pushkin to all the readers in India.

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