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An Overview of Indian Literature in English Translation

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Abstract

Indian literature is a genre of writings which include writings produced by the Indian Writers in their native language such as Sanskrit, Pali, Tamil, Bengali, and so on. These works were in different forms. The roots of Indian literature can be dated to the origin of the human civilisation. It has undergone several changes over the years till the present. These literatures were translated into other vernacular languages. However, with the colonisation of India Indian Literature went through a different phase. The growth in English education and language began to slowly hinder the foundations of these original languages and many Indian works were translated into English. The researcher thus in this paper **Indian Literature and English Translation** seeks to portray the following, Firstly, Indian literature which can be traced with the beginning of the human civilization and the translation of these works in other Indian vernacular languages. Secondly, with the colonisation of India, English translation gained its importance and thirdly with English translation at its peak, how various Indian literary works in English have received a world-wide recognition in the field of Indian Literature.

This research topic holds great significance in the field of literature as it contributes to Indian Literature. More over in the arena of academia, the students have various translated works of Indian writers into English. The research approaches used in this research paper will largely be conceptual and qualitative.

Keywords : *Translation, Indian Languages, Vernacular Languages, Indian Literature.*

An Overview of Indian Literature in English Translation

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Introduction

Indian Literature is a genre of writing penned by Indian writers. These writings are in different Indian vernacular languages. Thus translation has played an important role in reviving these literary works and making it available for its multilingual readers.

‘Translation’ can be defined as a human activity in which we can write one language to another with the challenge of enduring its original meaning. Translation Studies is a domain of studies which deal with the translated literary works. Translation serves as a bridge between the literature of the past and present. It is bridging the gap between the original texts and the new readers who read in the language of the ‘other’.

Indian Literature and its early translations

In the literary history of the Indian subcontinent, translation has played a key role in as it is playing now. Over a thousand years back, when the Indo-Aryans began to use literature as an expression, translation gained its importance. The early Indian writings were written in Sanskrit. It is considered as the mother of many Indian languages. Indian Literature has its roots deep in the history of English Literature. Its roots can be traced until the 6th century with a record of the Vedas and followed by the great Indian Vedas and epics - Ramayana and Mahabharata in Sanskrit along with other philosophical texts.

The Mughal Period in India during the thirteenth to 16th century gave a boost to translations. King Akbar and Prince Dara Shikoh (1615-1659), a profoundly learned scholar himself, in their reign organised constant debates in order to promote understanding among different faiths and encouraged scholars to translate works from Sanskrit. Along with Sanskrit, Turkish and Persian works were also translated and debated. These two languages dominated the Indian literary genre as a dominant Indian Languages due to its political domination, during these centuries. Besides these two languages there were subtle translations from Sanskrit to Dravidian languages. The centuries between thirteenth and sixteenth century, saw a need to translate the earlier literature and this gave rise to translations in various Indian languages – Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and Malyalam. Kannada language developed fully after the tenth century AD. The earliest known literary work in Kannada is Kavirajamang written by the Rashtrakuta King, Nripatunga Amoghavarsha I. Pampa, known as the father of Kannada who wrote great poetic works Adi Purana and Vikramarjiva Vijaya in the tenth century AD. Kannada literature flourished

considerably between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries under the patronage of the Vijayanagara kings.

Over the years we see a writers attempt to translate the original work to their own language or any other Indian language. The writers drew the attention from the source language Sanskrit to the target language. One of such literary work is *Mahabharata* of Vyasa and *Ramayana* of Valmiki. Sujit Mukherjee in his essay remarks the result as “*Pampa- Bharata* or *Vikrama Arjuna- Vijayam* of Pampa in Kannada in the 10th century, *Kamba-Ramayana* of Kamban in Tamil in the 11th century, *Vilanka-Ramayana* of Sarala Dasa in Oriya in the 14th century, an Asamiya version of *Mahabharata* episodes by Harihara Vipra and Kaviratna Sarasvati also in the 14th century, a Bangla version of *Ramayan* by Krittibas Ojha in the 15th century and so on.” Thus we can see a text translated into several Indian Languages. Besides this we have various writers who contributed immensely go the genre of Indian Literature.

The later century exposed to imperial colonisation underwent a new change in society and literature. The Europeans made several efforts to promote their language. They also took keen interest in the Indian culture and art and with the help of Indians began to translate the available literary texts and other written records. One among these is Sir William Jones’s translation of *Sacoontala* (as per his translated cover page) translated the work from Sanskrit. With English as the medium of instruction, many writers who wrote during this time in their mother tongue began to translate their work into English. For instance, Rabindranath Tagore, Aurobindo Ghosh, Raja Rao, Sarojini Naidu and others. These writers preferred to translate their own work, in order to preserve their unique flavour. While on the other hand other Indian writers translated other Indian works into English. This resulted in the growth of many English readers and by the 19th century English had widely replaced the earlier common languages like Persian, Sanskrit, Prakrit, and so on.

English translations of Indian Literature

When the English language came to India, it saw signs of making its presence and one of these is through the act of translation. The increase in wide spread of English as a language in India gave way for various opportunities for Indians world-wide. In the field of Literature as well English dominated its presence. This literature was a way used by many of the writers of this time to write back to the empire. At the same time many writers felt the need to translate their work from its vernacular language to English. As a result of which, English translations of Indian literature gave recognition and mass awareness of these works in the field of Indian English literature.

The growing numbers in translations of literary texts has increased the number of Indian literature in English translation today. This has not only elevated Indians to translate Indian Language texts into English but also motivated them to pen poetry, fiction and drama in English. Literature has long enjoyed the patronage of English readers, while the same cannot be said of Hindi, Tamil and Kannada or other English language books. This owes its merit to the English speaking people toward the vernacular Author and translator, Ira Pande says that as a result of this she had to translate Hindi literature, written by her mother Shivani and others, to English.

Translations in India got a top shot in the 1980s, when the Sahitya Akademi started organizing translation workshops across the country. Moreover Katha, an organization set up in 1989 based in Delhi, provided an added impetus to translations. These two translation organizations considered translations in and from 22 Indian languages and also re-translated the translated texts into other Indian Languages. Some of the earliest translated published texts are *The Puppet's Tale* (1969) by Manik Bandopadhyay from Bangla, *Wild Bapu of Garambi* (1968) by Shridhar Pendse from Marathi and *Gora* by Rabindranath Tagore. The Akademi has also translated works of ancient Indian Literature into English as well.

The twentieth century thus threw light on various translations by Indian writers who translated their own work or translated works authored by another writer. It witnessed the re-reading, re-writing, and revival of the literary texts belonging to the Indian literature. It is noticed that the translated works have got demand from its readers than the in its source language. This could be because of the restricted knowledge of a language which makes the work to get only its regional recognition. English being a global and a language of everyman today seeks more demand from its English-speaking readers. Some of these texts which the researcher throws light upon are *Samskara* by U. R. Ananthamurthy, written in 1965 in Kannada, and translated into English by as translated by the renowned poet A.K.Ramanujan in 1976. It is a story set in a small village called Durvasapura in the Western Ghats of Karnataka and revolves around the Brahmin Community of this village. Rabindranath Tagore was the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. His novel *Gora* originally written in 1910 Bengali translated his work in English for its English readers. Likewise his other works *Gitanjali* in 1910, which is a collection of song offerings, has been translated in English. Other novels such as *Tamas* by Bhisam Sahni originally from Hindi have been translated into English.

Another English translated novel is *Chemmeen* (Prawns) is a Malayalam novel written by Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai in 1956. *Chemmeen* tells the story of the relationship between Karuthamma, the daughter of a Hindu fisherman, and Pareekutti, the son of a Muslim fish wholesaler. *Chemmeen* has been translated into English many times. Narayana Menon's translation titled *Anger of the Sea-Goddess* remains very popular even to this day. Other English translations are by T. S. Pillai and Anita Nair.

Besides novelists the Indian playwrights translated their work in English. Girish Karnad a well-known Indian Playwright, with Kannada as his mother tongue translated his works into English. Some of them are, *Nagamandala* (1988) *Hayvadhana* (1972), *Yayati* (1961) and *Tuglaq* (1964). The Marathi play *Ghashiram Kotwal* is a Marathi play written by playwright Vijay Tendulkar 1972 is a political satire served the purpose of writing in response to the rise of a local political party, Shiv Sena, in Maharashtra. It is translated by Eleanor Zelliot and Jayant Karve. The translation of *The Poisoned Bread* (1992) by Arjun Dangle is a collection of Marathi poems and short stories highlighting the plight of the Dalit's. These works have been translated by varied translators.

Among the Goan writers we have Damodar Mauzo who writes in his mother tongue Konkani and at times in Marathi. He is a well-known short story and novel writer. His works have been

translated by Xavier Cota. One of his translated short stories is *Teresa's Man*. Another notable Goan writer is Pundalik Naik, who writes in Konkani and his famous translated work is *Upheavel* (originally as *Achev*).

Contributions of English translations

In the 19th century English became the official language of India. With the growing English taste buds, English translations formed the core of Indian literature. The English translation of the Indian literature, from their vernacular, has contributed to Indian Literature in several ways: firstly it has helped in reaching out to its wide spread English readers and has thrown light upon the varied Indian literary texts in vernacular languages. Secondly, it has helped in the revival of various regional literary works. And thirdly, these English translations serve the purpose of preservation and transference of knowledge to its other readers.

In the contemporary scenario English has become a global language. It is not the language of us Indians. However it is a socially planetary language. The same is seen in India. India was under the clutches of the British for over a century. With English as the medium of education, this language made its presence felt in the social scenario.

Conclusion

Therefore, we see how Indian Literature is a wide canon with literature from different states and in varied regional languages. The literature being in the regional language serves as a limitation to its other language reader. It is seen that in these past few decades English language has grown worldwide and has become the language of the common man. This has helped us to overcome this limitation. And today we see translation as an independent genre and its purpose of bringing Indian literature in its vernacular language into the front light.

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