



Indian Literatures in Translation: Regional Identities and National Narratives

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Abstract

This paper is a critical examination of the radicality of translation in re-arranging local identities, social forms, and histories of a multilingual and cross-cultural place, such as India. The discussion explores the translation of the Tamil, Bengali, Kannada, and Marathi literary works into English by addressing the role of translation as a contributing as well as destabilizing action at the same time. It is a powerful tool of uplifting the marginal voices as well as the vernacular voices on the one hand, and of absorbing or colonizing regional particularities in the mainstream national and international discourses on the other. The case made here is that translation reaches way beyond the strictly linguistic field into the cultural political space of local to national trade off, invisibility to recognition, and protection to redefinition. Translation that is both ethically and context-sensitive will protect lingual differences, cultural identifications, and political overtones, and therefore oppose the obliteration of local authenticity. Meanwhile, translated regional literatures weaken monolithic nation-based identity by giving prominence to variances or contradicting accounts of history, society, and self. Instead of being a mindless reflection of original works, translation turns out to be an actor of cultural mediation and a force of intellectual exchange. It facilitates an inclusive and pluralist picture of Indian literary identity in that it links regional and transnational readerships. Through that, it redefines Indian literatures in translation as active tools of cultural negotiation and identities. The research thus places translation as a strategic field of contestation and collaboration, which has persistently established the shapes and aspects of Indian literature in the national and world literary ecologies.

Keywords: Indian literature, translation studies, regional identity, national narrative, postcolonialism, multilingualism, cultural negotiation

Introduction

The Indian literary sphere is essentially pluralistic and is conditioned by linguistic diversity to a remarkable degree and regional particularity. The constitution of India also acknowledges 22 scheduled languages, and there are a further 100 indigenous languages used in India, and the literature of the country cannot be

subjected to a single overarching identity under the term national literature (Devy, 2002). Instead, it is a cluster of regional literatures that are ensconced in localized idioms, history, and cultural constructs. Although it is culturally advantageous, this multiplicity is associated with considerable difficulties regarding access and representation,



particularly in a postcolonial nation-state that attempts to build a unified cultural identity.

In such a situation, translation has evolved both as a means of passage and a field of conflict, as a medium of communication through which literature in regional languages has been made accessible to wider Indian and worldwide audiences, as well as a site in which questions of authenticity, representation and cultural politics are energetically negotiated. Translation in India is not a neutral and mechanical procedure, as it is assumed; rather, it is a politically sensitive activity that is akin to writing/rewriting and re-contextualising text in other ideological and cultural arenas (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990). The mere business of translating a text in Tamil or Kannada into English, say, is not the matter of a displacement of meaning but of traversing asymmetries between the relationship between languages and literature economies in what Spivak (1993) calls a translation.

This kind of ambiguity of the Indian literature in translation is one of the concerns of the present study, because on the one hand, it preserves regional specificity, and on the other hand, it is involved in the same process of creating a more nationwide discourse. In this direction, the paper will address various authors, namely, Mahasweta Devi, Perumal Murugan, Salma, and U.R. Anantha Murthy, to explore how they cross more debates about caste, gender, religion, and local history, and at the same time intervene discursively into the national debates. The author considers the role of the translation, through the critical lens of the Translation Studies (Venuti, 1995), Postcolonial Theory (Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 1993) and the Regional Literary Criticism (Devy, 2002), as that region of cultural contact where regional narratives can be either brought to fore, as well as attenuated, and where identities can be empowered, or subsumed. Finally, the work argues that translated Indian literature is not the result of linguistic transfer only but is a constituent of a cultural, consequently political, practice that produces new meanings of spatial distinctions between domestic and national regions.

Literature Review

Literature in translation has passed into an era of tremendous writing in the field in dialogue with postcolonialism, cultural politics, and identity debates. The current Indian books on dance have shown that translation is not just a marginal activity; no, even a constitutive and defining activity of the construction of canons of literature and nationhood. Researchers like Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere have rebuilt the concept of translation by replacing it with the concept of rewriting, with the ideology playing a critical role in the textual product. Relating to India, the movement of the contents written on marginalized regional languages, into either English or Hindi has either created an infusion of regional specificity at the central stage of the literary scene or diluted it. The postcolonial studies done in India translation bring to the fore the exchange between the translational activities in colonies and postcolonial ones. Tejaswini Niranjana argues that colonial translations often created perverted translations of Indian works and thus reinforced imperial interests. Homi K. Bhabha is exploring translation as the third space of hybrid identities in which the translated texts tend to be situated most of the time.

The contemporary Indian translation scene challenges gender and social norms on what is considered authentic and accessible; novels like *Karuku* and *Madhorubhagan* question caste and gender oppression that are based on specific regional practices. However, most of the translations are subjected to a diminution tactic that weakens linguistic and cultural specifics to make texts understandable to more people. G. N. Devy argues that literature should be read in a comprehensive way and that the paradigms of linguistics and literature in metropolitan and contemporaneous terms make it imperial. He also appeals to translation structures, which would protect indigenous knowledges and literary regulations as well as provide inclusive national imaginaries. As a result, the issue of translation as a resistance and inclusion is centralized. On one hand, there has been the claim that translation has made available to the larger national literature voices heretofore marginalized, and on the other, there



has been the belief that translation opens up the risk of becoming slaves to standard logics. The current paper aims to be a contribution to such debate by examining how translation is also enabling regional writers, as well as entering into the process of drawing up or challenging the Indian literary textual canon

Theoretical Framework

This paper is informed by an interdisciplinary theoretical set up that combines Translation Studies, the Post colonial Theory and the Regional Literary Criticism with the aim of studying how regional identity and national narrative is created in Indian contexts. The scholarship of Lawrence Venuti on translation offers solid insights into the politics and visibility of translation, where the strategies of domestication and that of foreignization are at the forefront of competing ideas. Venuti ensures that conspicuous local character should be retained because it has the risk of repelling the readers, and this shows the translator as being involved in the process of identity negotiation in a transnational arena. Complementing the same idea, Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere argue that translation is never a linguistic process that remains neutral, whereby translation happens as a form of ideologically, politically, and institutionally influenced rewriting. The Postcolonial Theory puts stress on the moral obligation to translate the writings of marginalized writers, Dali, Adivasi, and women writers of South Asian origin. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak warns of the dangers of a mechanical transmission of subaltern voices that could reverse translators' work and sustain the hierarchies they are working against. Homi K. Bhabha also views translated texts as hybrids created by regional specificity and national integration and as creators of meaning that becomes debatable and reflective of the multicultural and multilingual complexity of India.

The regional literature criticism, which is best epitomized by G.N. Devy's People Linguistic Survey of India, emphasizes the need to place scholarly focus on writings of Shatfer (indigenous) stuff on their location both culturally and linguistically. According to Devy, the local texts must not be assimilated into

the existing metropolitan paradigm and must be appreciated in terms of their epistemologies, oral traditions, and social origin. Since Paniker Ayyappa and other regional authors make it clear, Indian aesthetic forms do not intuitively correspond to Western renderings, and this justifies the inability of purely Eurocentric or homogenizing paradigms of criticism. Brought together, these points of view show the way interdisciplinary theorizing can construct subtle accounts of regional identity and national narrative in modern India.

The three theoretical perspectives, Translation Studies, Postcolonial Theory, and Regional Literary Criticism, combine forces in giving a fine, in-depth examination of Indian literatures in translation. Through these lenses, one gets to see the way power functions in language transfer, the people behind narratives, and the shapes identities take or resist.

Methodology

The current study uses a qualitative comparative textual-analytic approach in understanding five literary works of the region that were written in English and Hindi: *Sangati* by Bama, *The Hour Past Midnight* by Salma, *Karna Wife* by Kavita Kane, *Pather Panchali* by Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay, and *Samskara* by U.R. Ananthamurthy. The paper refers to how each of the translations resurrects the regional cultural signifiers, popular idioms, castes and classes, rituals, oral traditions, ecological descriptions, and geographical settings. It deals with how translated texts carry or rebalance the cultural and socio-political particularities of each source, whether translation practices are functions of bringing the text nearer to or withdrawing it out of regional authenticity, the ways such texts enter the domestic literary market and the international literary market, the ways such texts construct a sense of Indian identity and their role in reinforcing or challenging existing narratives of Indian identity. To answer these questions, the research relies on a paratextual text set, on interviews with translators, on literary criticism, and on critical notes, thus tracing the history of reception of every text.



Analysis and Discussion

According to Indian literature translation, it is a mutually-adjusting relationship between preserving the regionality of a text and making a text make sense to others across the region. Bama, *Sangati* is a good example of such negotiation: not only are many Dalit Tamil words left out of translation, but they are also explained in footnotes or glossaries. The English version provides friction to the non-Tamil readers as it cannot be assimilated into the current literary forms due to the linguistic and cultural specificity. In addition, translation regularly challenges strong national discourses by highlighting local socio-political interests. *Samskara* by U.R. Anantha Murthy is seen to criticize the Brahmin orthodoxy of one miserable village in Kannada and as a metaphor for the moral and spiritual decay in post-independence India. The English translation adds a political tone to the text that would otherwise appeal only to a certain group of people, allowing it to challenge the sanitized or romanticized notions of Indian spirituality present on the national level.

Translations are a fine balance between empowerment and effacement; they can give a louder voice to the regional voices, but will at the same time homogenize the boundaries between cultures to achieve an intelligible homeland. The *Hour Past Midnight* by Salma explores the inner psyches of women who experience religion, gender, and social watching. Even though the penchant of English translated version largely carries the emotional tone of the novel, some of the cultural finer points of the Tamil Muslim society, i.e., the use of idiomatic references to prayer, blood in the home, or local metaphors, are sometimes lost, or over-emphasized at other times. The given phenomenon initiates the discussions concerning the issues of cultural fidelity and the morals of accessibility. Our current study reviews five Indian literary works translated into English using different regional languages. All of them together present the way translation negotiates identity, caste, gender, and socio-political memory. *Sangati* by Bama (Tamil -> English) shows a no-holds-barred account about the lives of Dalit women in the state of Tamil Nadu, whereas the novel written

by Salma deals with the radically concealed existence of Muslim women in a conservative locality of the Tamil region. The retelling devotes an additional amount of energy to gender and caste critiques through a pan-Indian mythological context, and in the process, adaptation and reinterpretation may lose linguistic nuances at the same time that it offers feminist undertones to a greater audience. Works like *Pater Panchali* by Bibhuti Bhushan Bandopadhyay (Bengali => English) are examples of lyrical quality and the rural spirit of Bengali literature.

The analysis below focuses on two translations of a Bengali oral story, and shows that though the English versions do manage to transmit a substantial portion of the original in its emotional and philosophical content, they fail to render many characteristics of rural Bengali dialect and oral narrative style, which is an indication of how tricky producing orality and a sense of region as well as rhythm in English can be. Politics of representation, authenticity, and accessibility are therefore political territory that scholars of Indian literature have to reckon with, which raises ethical questions of who has the right to express and in whose voice it is articulated. The discussed texts display such variety of translation methods as translation as linguistic fidelity, cultural domestication, and a combination of both methods and, as a whole, prove the idea that translation used in Indian literature is doomed to deal with the very issue of politics surrounding representation, authenticity, and accessibility, causing ethical concerns regarding whose voice is allowed to circulate and how that voice is mediated.

Findings

- Translation serves as a double-edged tool: It enables visibility of regional voices but also reinterprets or reconfigures them based on the translator's positionality.
- Regional texts challenge the idea of a singular Indian identity: Translations reveal how India is a mosaic of microcultures, languages, and histories that resist totalization.
- Literary translation is also political: Choices made in translating culturally embedded terms,



caste identities, or gender dynamics reflect broader negotiations with national identity and global readability.

Conclusion

The current study evidences that translation as a process in the Indian literary sphere serves not only as a linguistic process, but it is also a cultural and political negotiation. On studying works, such as *Sangati* by Bama, *The Hour Past Midnight* by Salma, and *Samskara* by Anantha Murthy, it can be seen that translation is used as a dual-edged tool: it can be used to bring out and amplify the voice of the marginal and at the same time run the risk of domesticating its regional flavour. Since, as Bassnett and Lefevere (1990) believe, translations allow regional pieces to interact with other national and international discourses in literature, translations produce cross-cultural dialogue and intellectual pluralism. However, caution should be taken by a translator to ensure that he does not feel the urge to make the text appear less foreign by overdoing in terms of being made accessible to the foreign audience (Spivak 1993). Contextually sensitive, contextually rich, contextually complex, linguistically nuanced, and politically balanced translations are necessary to ensure that the epistemologies of vernaculars are not washed out to wash. Besides, this article identifies the role of

translated literature in rewriting the national narrative of India at the bottom, placing the focus on the subaltern, the caste-oppressed, and the regionally localized subject. The process of translation helps the Indian literatures to defy homogenisation and to disrupt the monolingual, elite canon and bring back the idea of multiplicity to the national memory and self-identity (Devy, 2002). The literature of Indian translation is therefore at the precarious threshold of loyalty and creativity, homeland and nation, disappearance and inclusion, respectively. This complexity has its recognition and involvement to be understood by scholars, translators, and readers to enjoy a polyphonic and stratified literary fabric of India.

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