



Exploring the Politics of Postcolonial Translation: Texts and Contexts

Dr. Vibhuti Gaur

Associate Professor of English

IGNOU

Email: gaurvibhuti@gmail.com

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Keywords :

Translation, politics, ethics, trans/intercultural, trans / interlingual, truth, essence, sufficiency, representation, discourse, Orient, inter-generational transmission, memorialization

ABSTRACT

Translation's politics and ethics have grown in significance alongside its poetics and aesthetics. The translation is trans/intercultural as much as it is trans/interlingual. Derrida's criticism of representation matters calls into question the accepted understanding of translation. The traditional notion of translation—which falls under the categories of truth, essence, sufficiency, and representation—needs to be thoroughly examined. This is also the order in which historical discourse operates, suppressing diversity to produce writings that are transparent and cohesive, much like translation does, and therefore contributing to the process of colonial dominance. Theory of translation must avoid being mired in the representational politics. The colonial goal of translating native works into Indian languages was a component of a greater Imperialist project. In the contemporary era translations are no longer needed to further enhance the eroticisation of the Orient or to enrich British culture, as pride in national culture and confidence has grown. Vision of translation now is to identify translation as a literary theme, a critical practice, medium of inter-generational transmission and intercultural exchange, and a mode of memorialization.

While I was working on my PhD, someone asked me, "What are you translating?" out of mild curiosity. As a follower of the traditional philosophical discourse up until that point, which only serves to practise "translation as ," I retorted, "I'm translating original Haryanvi folk narratives into English." The other person was satisfied with my response, but it left me feeling completely let down. I couldn't get the lofty sounding word "Original" out of my head until I learnt about the idea of a postcolonial translator. The

topic of how far my fieldwork collections, archives, and written materials could be considered "original" kept coming up and needed to be addressed.

Translation's politics and ethics have grown in significance alongside its poetics and aesthetics. The translation is trans/intercultural as much as it is trans/interlingual. Derrida, for instance, challenges the idea of an origin or original that requires representation, which calls into question the traditional understanding of representation. According to Derrida, the 'origin' is inherently distributed, making its "identity" indeterminate. Therefore, a representation reflects that which is always previously represented rather than re-presenting a "original."(Derrida,1978)

Derrida's work provides post-colonialists with valuable insights, one of which is the idea that origin is inherently heterogeneous and does not represent a single, cohesive source of meaning or history (Derrida,1978).

Representation in the traditional sense underlies all of western philosophy by stifling the distinction that already exists in the so-called genesis. Derrida describes this philosophy as one of "presence," of the "complete proximity of self-identity and of presence to oneself." (Derrida,1978).Derrida argues that concepts of adequate representation and totalisation of history are ways in which western philosophy attempts to reclaim "presence" or the origin. Like the sign's structure, Cartesian-Hegelian history can only be imagined in terms of the presence it postpones and the deferred presence one hopes to reclaim, with its origin and "telos" and its goal to create a narrative that is all-encompassing (Derrida,1978).

In challenging dominant discourses, we must not only critically examine representation but also develop a nuanced understanding of "historicity," or "effective history," which is defined as historical knowledge that is still relevant today. Reading history effectively would enable us to see things differently. But the reason Derrida's criticism of representation matters is that it calls into question the accepted understanding of translation. In actuality, Derrida's writing has always combined the two issues. His statement that "translation perhaps escapes 'the orbit of representation'" has appeared several times. Translation becomes the indication for what Derrida would refer to as dissemination if representation is the reclaiming of presence. (Derrida 1973).

However, the traditional notion of translation—which falls under the categories of truth, essence, sufficiency, and representation—needs to be thoroughly examined. This is also the order in which historical discourse operates, suppressing diversity to produce writings that are transparent and cohesive,

much like translation does, and therefore contributing to the process of colonial dominance. Nonetheless, theory of translation must avoid being mired in the representational sequence when it employs the ideas it criticises out of necessity.

Writing that "both marks and goes back over its mark with an undecidable stroke" is what Derrida would advise since it "escapes the pertinence or authority of truth" and reinscribing by inhabiting the structures it deconstructs (Derrida 1978). Derrida points out a similarity between Walter Benjamin's citation/quotation approach and the double inscription. According to Benjamin, "the critical historiographer, or historical-materialist, employs a way of quoting without using quotation marks." (Benjamin 1970). This is one method of exposing the constellation that an earlier era makes with the current one without having to succumb to an origin-and-telos order inside a historical continuum. We can resist the processes of subjectification and dominance that are visible in histories or translations by considering the idea of a double writing.

As Fanon notes, native intellectuals were anxious to distance themselves from the western culture that threatened to engulf them all. This fear was the real cause of their "passionate search for a national culture which existed before the colonial era." It is easy to forget that methods and languages that are "borrowed" from the coloniser are frequently used in the production of culture in colonised areas. "The attitude of the native intellectual sometimes takes on the aspect of a cult or of a religion" (Fanon 1967).

Now, I fully comprehended the context of my present inhabited world and also the world of my collected folk narratives. Being a post-colonial translator of North Indian state i.e Haryana, I had been wary of essentialist anti-colonial narratives; In fact, every postcolonial translator must attempt to deconstruct their work, to show their complicity with the master-narrative of imperialism. This is a crucial task especially at a time when the various myths of secularism et al - have become repressive forces in decolonized country like ours. What Fanon called "a complete calling in question of the colonial situation" is what the translator has to engage in. This involves revisiting liberal nationalism and yearning for one's past, neither of which offer "grounds" for an ideological production that would challenge the hegemony or serve as models for intervention (Fanon 1967).

The idea put forth by Homi Bhabha that "a state of emergency is always a state of emergence." A disruptive concept of history is necessary to address the post-colonial state of emergency and emergence. This concept will also help formulate a notion of representation and translation to account

for the disparate identities of the post-colonial "subject" by problematising the pursuit of adequacy (Homi Bhabha 1985).

According to Derrida, we must examine the idea of translation and language, which is frequently dominated by the idea of representation, a presumption, or the need for an unchanging identity, before we can determine how and what to translate via representation. (Derrida 1973)

When French theorist Ricoeur characterises the "ethics of translation as an interlinguistic hospitality," this is ultimately what he means to convey. There are many different kinds of people, civilisations, and languages in the globe. Humanity is a pluralistic species. This implies that, if the hermeneutic model of translation is followed, each valid type of universality must always locate its corresponding plurality. The creative tension that exists between the plural and the universal guarantees that translating is an ongoing process of accepting and letting go, expressing oneself, and opening oneself to others.

Ricoeur fully acknowledges the challenges provided by the untranslatable as well as the difficulties associated in any act of translation, but he nevertheless promotes "linguistic equivalency," or "comparability or commensurability," as a workable approach to reconsider the ethics of translation. This idea of equivalency is evocative since it is not precisely anything premade, such as an existing or already current condition; rather, it is something that must be manufactured, or perhaps better described as a task. Ricoeur's idea is that equivalency should be strived for rather than assumed to be firmly achieved, whether at the level of merely linguistic or intercultural contacts. (Ricoeur 2006)

Equivalency reminds us of Johannes Fabian's famous idea of "coevals" in this sense. Similar to coevalness, equivalency here is more than just an assertion of temporal or spatial coexistence; rather, it is a vision that, as is to be expected, will occasionally encounter resistance and sabotage but that will never stray from the fundamentals of reciprocity and exchange that form the basis of cross-cultural interactions. (Johannes Fabian 1986)

According to Achebe's diagnosis of Conrad's description of blackness, when a writer pretends to capture scenes, incidents, and their impact while actually using a barrage of emotive words and other deceptive techniques to induce hypnotic stupor in his readers, much more than stylistic felicity is at risk, Conrad

made a wise choice in selecting his subject, one that will ensure he does not clash with the psychological makeup of his audience or have to overcome their opposition. Did he decide to become a soothing myth purveyor?(
Achebe 1975)

Achebe is concerned about the relationship between Africans and Europeans between the River Congo and the River Thames. This role of "purveyor of myths" is also that of an intercultural translator. Achebe is not particularly interested in translating meanings from one language into another (as in the more literal sense of translation). His main area of interest is the "codes of trans evaluation between cultures" that authors use even when they write in a single language since they are implicitly activated. (Achebe 1975)

There was thus another level of translation endeavour, apart from the usual one, that resulted from colonial expansionism and that started to become more and more demanding of acknowledgement. Translation was regarded as one of the main ways that colonisers and colonised interacted culturally in nineteenth-century India, for example. It was widely believed that these language exchanges may bring the two closer.

According to recent analyses of some of these older translations, they frequently appropriated or distorted the original texts to further the objectives of the nation's dominant power structures. The colonial goal of translating native works into Indian languages was a component of a greater Imperialist project. Translation into English was thus seen as an academic endeavour, predicated on the idea that the source language was superior. Additionally, it served to entice the reader to revisit the original in a changed state. Furthermore, as the source language material was thought to be of lesser quality, an attempt was made to improve it.

There was a need related to trade and commerce that drove the first British involvement in the study of Indian languages. Since the locals were seen as being extremely unreliable in their commerce dealings, it was in their best advantage to learn and speak the language for the purpose of collecting land revenue and conducting business. As a result, young agents of the East India Company received instruction in regional Indian and Persian languages and were encouraged to study English translations of Sanskrit books. A few of them had extraordinary skill and dedicated themselves to translating from Persian and Sanskrit books. This explains why Hastings gave Sanskrit and Persian, which were the official court languages at the time, support.

The attitudes of translators under the Roman Empire are indicative of a long-lasting attitude towards the translation process. According to this perspective, the translator's main duty is to introduce the author to the reader.

The opposing job of bringing the reader to the author only suddenly comes to prominence very late in the history of translation. In Schleiermacher's words, the translator should "not leave the reader in peace and move the writer towards him, but to leave the writer in peace and move the reader towards the writer." This new emphasis on fidelity to the original text was primarily advocated by German Romantics like A.W. Schlegel and Friedrich Schleiermacher.

This shift in the reader's perspective towards the author denotes a fresh understanding of the goal of translation. Translation should aim to increase the possibilities inside one's own language, rather than to improve or broaden the source language.

Translation had a very different goal throughout the second period of colonialism. The process of translation was methodical and bidirectional, involving the translation of Indian writings into English and English into Indian languages through an orientalist approach. It was necessary because, for administrative and financial reasons, the colonists needed a cooperative class to accomplish their goals. In an effort to defend colonial dominance, attempts were made to represent the colonised. Therefore, there is a strong connection between the idea of colonial expansionism and the history of translation in India. During this time, various misconceptions about the East developed, which would have a significant impact on the colonised country's future cultural and national identity developments.

And this great Imperial vision was to include translation in a major way. However, the idea of total interdependence—that is, the idea that one becomes meaningless without the other—is the foundation of the colonizer/colonized relationship. Edward Said propagated the idea that "the orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting Image, idea, personality, and experience," (Edward Said 1978)

The colonial implications of these translations are made abundantly evident by a detailed inspection of a few of the orientalist's translated works. Since they were unreliable interpreters of their own history and culture, it seems clear that they wanted to "purify" Indian culture and speak for it. The most famous and notorious example is probably Macaulay's Education Minutes, in which he stated in 1835 that a "single shelf of European books was worth the whole literature of Indian and Arabia".(Macaulay 1835).

As the nineteenth century came to an end, translations were no longer needed to further enhance the eroticisation of the Orient or to enrich British culture, as pride in national culture and confidence grew despite Imperial authority.

The translator was reduced to the status of a mere technician and craftsman, and translation came to be seen as a debased kind of art.

The idea of translation being reduced to suit a hidden goal saw an evident response in the twentieth century. As a result, the process was, in a sense, depoliticised, and it was approached objectively as a mechanical craft—a simple transference from one linguistic framework to another with little to no regard to cultural and social context.

Recently, there has been an effort to free translation work from the limitations imposed by technical regulations pertaining to prohibitions on transference from Source Language to Target Language. Here is where the idea of free translation first appeared.

Translation is an endeavour to accurately and freely convey both the meaning and syntax of the original text while avoiding a literal rendering of the latter. According to Walter Benjamin, who supports the ideas of authenticity and freedom, "True translation is transparent; it does not obscure the original or obstruct the light; rather, it permits the pure language to shine upon the original more fully, as though reinforced by its own medium."(Benjamin 1960)

These writers have internalized the entire process of translation and are no longer concerned with transference from one language to another but have adopted the language of translation as their own. There is a complete fusion between the source language and the target language.

The Progressive vision of translation is to identify translation as a literary theme, a critical practice, medium of inter- generational transmission and intercultural exchange, and a mode of memorialization. The aim of translation neither domesticates nor estranges only but does both; a vital regenerative process occurs in the exchange between author, translator and reader.

I come to conclude from where I began. The politics and the poetics of translation are becoming more pointed and pronounced with each passing day. As a post-colonial translator of Haryanvi folk narrative into English my duty has always been to perform a balancing act between the language and culture.

On being awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1992, Derek Walcott gave a moving speech about the people in whose name, he said, he stood. Referring to the consoling pity with which the Antilles, his homeland, have typically been regarded by travellers, Walcott offered an unyieldingly critical statement about the kind of intercultural translation that specializes in melancholia-and that, ultimately, leads to the denial of every cultural endeavour undertaken by the formerly colonized that has to be belittled as berated, as mere imitation. Walcott's remarks seem especially perspicacious in light of our foregoing discussion. To conclude, let me cite a part of them:

These travellers carried with them the infection of their own malaise, and their prose reduced even the landscape to melancholia and self-contempt.

Work Cited

Achebe, Chinua. *Morning Yet on Creation Days: Essays*, New York Anchor Press, 1975.

Akali Patrika, 11th October, 1949.

Anuvad, New Delhi: Bhartiya Anuvad Parishad.

Bassnett, Susan -McGuire. *Translation Studies*, London: Methuen, 1980.

Benjamin, Walter. *The Task of the Translator, Illuminations*. ed. Hannah Amdht, London: Jonathan Cape, 1970.

Bhaba, Homi. *Signs taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a tree outside Delhi*. *Critical Inquiry*, 12.1(1985)144-65.

Catford, J.C. *A Linguistic theory of Translation*, London: Oxford, 1965.

Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*, Trans. Alan Bass. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Baltimore, MD and London, UK: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

Derrida, Jacques. *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

Fabian, Johannes. *Language and Colonial Power: The Appropriation of Swahili in the Former Belgian Congo 1880-1938*, University of California Press, 1986.

Fanon, Franz. *The Wretched of the Earth*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967.

Finley, Ian. *Translating*, London: Teach Yourself Books, 1971.

- Fitzgerald, Edward. Letters, Vol. I and II. London: Macmillan, (1901) 320.
- Forster, Leonard. Aspects of Translation ,London: Seeker and Warburg, 1958.
- Holmes, James, S. Approaches to Translation Studies ,Assen:Van Gorcum.
- Levy, J. The Art of Translation, ed.Susan Bassnett McGuire, Prague ,1963.
- Macaulay, Thomas Babington. English Education Act, 1935.
- Newmark, P. Approaches to Translation ,Oxford:Pergamon,1981.
- Nida, E.A, Towards a Science of translation. Leiden: E.J.Bill, 1964.
- Nida, E.A. and Charles R. Taber, The Theory and Practice of Translation,Leindec: E.J.Bill, 1974.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich .On the Problem of Translation in Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida, eds. Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet ,Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Niranjana, Tejaswini. Siting Translation History, Post-Structuralism and the Colonial Context. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ricoeur ,Paul. On Translation, Routledge,2006.
- Savory, Theodore. The Art of Translation ,London: Jonathan Cape, 1957.
- Steiner, T.R. English Translation Theory.1650-1800 ,Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975.
- Said, Edward. Orientalism, Pantheon Books,1978.

www.egyankosh.ac.in