

A Survey of Translations of Popular Literature into Urdu

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Abstract: Translation is a multifaceted process—linguistic, cultural, continuous and contradictory. Any language benefits from translation activity. Urdu also enriched itself with translation. Every translation is a part of literature, which is a translation in itself. Translation of literary works into Urdu is an old tradition. Popular literature has been translated into Urdu for over a century. The translation activity played a very important role in the development of the Urdu language. This research surveys the translations of popular literature, especially focusing on detective fiction, children's literature, adventure fiction and non-fiction. It traces the tradition of translation of popular literature into Urdu with the aim to explore works and authors while avoiding any critical analysis of reasons for translation of those works.

Keywords: Popular literature; Urdu translation; Detective fiction

I. INTRODUCTION

Translation is a multifaceted process—linguistic, cultural, continuous and contradictory. In view of this connotation, the medium of translation is language and its content is cultural. However, it is also

paradoxical because it simultaneously changes and preserves the original content. It is both conservative and innovative. In fact, it is a two-way process but its other way is seldom brought into focus. Translation is another kind of creative process and a translator is essentially a creator with abilities of imagination and interpretation. Translation can also be considered a two-way street. Although its external source of expression is language, it is like the veins in which the blood of civilization flows. Thus translation is in fact a linguistic process from a cultural point of view. It is a path to reach the heart of another civilization. Translation is more of a continuous process than an activity performed at one time. Because when a text is translated, it cannot be called a complete and final translation. There always remains a scope for a second or better translation. This feature is typically linked to creative writings. Literature is a translation in itself and every translation is a part of literature. Of course, the statement is conditional on the extent of the freedom that the translator has. In this broader context, this research surveys endeavors of various authors who translated popular literature into Urdu. It explores various works and translators, categorizes the translated works into different

genres, and avoids any critical analysis of the reasons for translation of those works.

II. TRANSLATION OF POPULAR LITERATURE INTO URDU

A clear objective of popular literature is to entertain the public.

“Popular literature includes those writings intended for the masses and those that find favour with large audiences. It can be distinguished from artistic literature in that it is designed primarily to entertain.” [*Encyclopaedia Britannica*]

Right from English to Urdu and many other literatures, the tradition of producing literature for mass consumption is prevalent. In the Urdu literature, this tradition is older than a century. For this research, it is relevant to look at the tradition of translation in the Urdu literature while surveying the translations of popular literature.

The Tradition of Translation in Urdu

Translation from other languages into Urdu is as old as the language itself. It has played a very important role in the development of the Urdu language. Literary translations of various texts into Urdu have enriched the language with new words, idioms, proverbs, sayings and scientific and literary ideas. Translations have played an extraordinary role in the journey of Urdu to become a regular scholarly and literary language. Dr. Z. Ansari writes:

“Urdu has become a regular language thanks to translations. As long as it was in the form of *khari boli*, no great writer considered it worthy of literary writing. Sometimes these translations were in book form and sometimes in the form of mere ideas, metaphors and terms. There is no room for repeating history here. However, it is

certain that in addition to Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit and English, translations and interpreters of *bhasha'en* have a great influence in the development of Urdu language.” [ANSARI, 70]

In fact, people who started writing poetry in Urdu in its initial days had Persian as their literary language. These poets composed Urdu poetry and literature under Persian influence. They also translated Persian works into Urdu. Gradually, these translators of the Urdu language started the literary journey of Urdu. Among these translators are Mulla Wajhi, who translated allegorical epic *Dastur-e-Ishq* as *Sub Ras* (Fattahi Nishapuri); Shah Miranji Khudanuma, who translated religious text *Tamhidaat-e-Ainul Qazat* as *Tamhidaat-e-Hamdani* (Ayn al-Quzat Hamadani); Shah Waliullah Qadri, who translated work on mysticism *Ma'rafat-e-Saluk* (Shah Shaikh Mahmood Khush Zuban Chishti); Fazl Ali Fazli, who translated epic *Rozatus Shohada* as *Karbal Katha* (Mulla Husayn Waiz Kashifi); and Malik Khushnood, who translated poetic work *Hasht Behesht* as *Jannat Singar* (Amir Khusro). [Qadri, 115-137] Though these translation endeavors must be acknowledged, the fact remains that neither the translators were professionals nor their translations were literary. By and large, these translators employed the method of free translation. Therefore, their works appear natural instead of translated texts. In absence of any formal and systematic rules for translation, these translators apparently followed their own wisdom.

Apart from these translations, Persian story *Bagh-o-Bahar's* (*Qissa Chaar Darvesh*) translation into Urdu by Mir Amman at Fort William College stands out as a fine example of literary translation primarily because of the

institutional patronage to the translation work. The same Persian story was earlier translated into Urdu by Ata Hussain Tehseen but it did not find many readers among masses.

It is clear that translation activity has been going on for over a century in Urdu. In this long journey, many works of popular literature have been translated too. A majority of these translated works of popular literature come under genres of detective, adventure, hunting, and children literature.

Detective Fiction in Urdu

According Urdu critic and author Mirza Hamid Baig, Zafar Umar introduced the detective novel in the Urdu literature. He translated the famous French detective novel Monsieur Lecoq into Urdu as *Neeli Chatri*. Later Mirza Mohammad Hadi Ruswa, Tirath Ram Firozpuri and others also translated several detective novels into Urdu, leading to the introduction of this genre into the Urdu literature. Mirza Hamid Baig also considered Ibn Safi to be the author with the first complete detective novel in Urdu. Until the publication of Ibn Safi's novel *Diler Mujrim* in 1952, the scope of detective fiction was largely limited to translations. With his works, Ibn Safi established himself as a famous contemporary detective novelist. [BAIG, 310-315]

Mirza Mohammad Hadi Ruswa translated Marie Corelli's detective novel *Wormwood* (1919) as *Khooni Ishq* and published in 1920. Later he published more detective novels, such as *Khooni Shehzada* in 1921, *Khooni Bhed* in 1924, *Khooni Joru* in 1928 and *Bahram Ki Wapsi* in 1928.

Another important name in translation of fiction is Tirath Ram Firozpuri. He translated

about 136 English novels into Urdu. Due to his frequent translations, he is very important among the early translators. His translation *Khooni Talwar* (two volumes) and *Khooni Heera* (two volumes) are popular. A trendsetter in the English detective fiction is Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who has written about 80 novels. A majority of his novels have been translated into Urdu in Pakistan. Among the translators of his novels are Asar Nomani, F.M. Siddiqui and Tahir Rana.

Children's Literature in Urdu

Apart from detective fiction, translations of popular literature include the Urdu translation of Rudyard Kipling's famous work *The Jungle Book*, which has been translated by Mohammed Inayatullah Khan as *Zulfi*. Another person to translate *The Jungle Book* was Maulana Zafar Ali Khan. A Hollywood film was made on this story in 1942 as *The Jungle Book* and a cartoon film was made in 1967 by Walt Disney as well. Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* has also been translated into Urdu by more than one person. It was first translated by Syed Fakhruddin under the title *Balishtiyon Ki Duniya* and published in 1938 from Calcutta. The same novel has been translated by Mohammad Nadeem also under the title *Lilliput Ka Safar*, which was published by Taraqqi Urdu Bureau, New Delhi.

Stories of Hunting and Adventure in Urdu

Another important genre of popular literature is hunting and adventure. A number of works of adventure and hunting have been translated into Urdu. The stories of famous hunters like Jim Corbett and Kenneth

Anderson became very popular in English. Both the Indian-born writers produced numerous stories of hunting and adventure, whose translations were published in popular magazines like *Shabistan* in India, *Nusrat* (weekly) and *Urdu Digest* in Pakistan. Hakim Mohammed Iqbal Hussain is an important figure in Urdu adventure fiction. He published a collection of Urdu translations of the hunting and adventure stories under the title *Ser-o-Shikar*, which have appeared in various journals. The 271-page collection was first published in 1966 from Karachi. In its Foreword, Iqbal Hussain has written about the translation of hunting as:

“It is also important for the translator of the hunter to have the necessary information about the hunting technique and the jungle itself, otherwise the translation will become a collection of words in some places which do not have a meaning...The translators have in some places blown such flies that the subject itself has become obsessed and even if it has not become obsessed, it has turned into boredom instead of interest.” [HUSSAIN, Foreword]

Apart from Iqbal Hussain's collection, another collection of hunting stories titled *Shikar Biti* was published in 1970 by Book Service, Delhi. The stories in the collection were translated by Rehan Ahmed Abbasi. One more such collection, based on published stories selected from Lahore's *Nusrat* (weekly), was brought out by Maktaba Jadeed Lahore in 1961. The collection's forward was written by Col. Jim Corbett himself but there was no mention of who translated these hunting stories into Urdu. Though stories of hunting campaigns are still published in Pakistan's *Urdu Digest*, the Indian magazine *Shabistan* already shut its doors.

Popular Non-Fiction in Urdu

Non-fiction also finds a place in popular literature. In addition to popular literary genres, non-fiction books have also become very popular. Books with loaded ideas and complexity are presented effectively keeping in view the readers. For example, Osho Rajneesh's books on philosophy and spirituality, Stephen Covey's books on personality, Friedman's books on economics, Dale Carnegie's self-help books etc. are read with great interest all over the world and are also translated into Urdu. In addition, some of the popular non-fiction books that could be translated into Urdu fall under following broad categories:

- Management, business studies, and personality development.
- Children's information books.
- Women's books on family, pediatrics, nutrition and health.
- Self-improvement and self-help.

In modern times, principles and theories of the organization of life are also explained in delightful language and attractive passages, and complex philosophies are presented in a very simple way through stories, parables, jokes etc. These kinds of books meant for the tired mind are also popular. There is plenty of scope to translate these works into Urdu as well.

III. CONCLUSION

The tradition of translating popular literature into Urdu has played a significant role in the promotion of various genres of literature in Urdu. Even today, there is a need for translations that are in tune with modern requirements and can enrich the Urdu

language. The translation of popular literature still remains in demand. Though the activity of translation in Urdu has slowed compared to other languages like Persian, the scope is still ample for translators to venture into the field of translation of popular literature. At the same time, this paper offers scope for researchers to analyze these translated works, exploring reasons for the translations, quality of the translations and popularity of the translations.

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