

Translation and World Literature: Reference Indian Literature*

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From Kalidas to Ghalib, Tagore, Premchand and Pash

- **Vedas to Kalidas**

If world today and before knew Indian literature from Vedas to Kalidas like Sanskrit classic writings and writers, one has to acknowledge the elementary fact that how much translation has contributed to the creation of the concept and reality of world literature. Not only Indian classics, Greek, Latin, Chinese, Arabic and many more classic texts of the world are known to us all, thanks to the translations of these texts in different languages of the world.

- **Bible and Marxism**

Perhaps The Bible and the Marxist classic texts are the most translated books of the world's printed texts. And translation has played no lesser role in spreading the ideas of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Marxism and other influential thoughts throughout the peoples and countries/nations/societies of the world. All the scientific/technological/academic development of the world would not have been possible, had there been no translation of the theories and experiment results of science, technology and other forms of knowledge.

- **Indian Literature: Vedas from India**

Four Vedas-Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva are most ancient text available from India, which have reached throughout the world through mostly English, but other languages like German translations as well.

- **Ancient Texts-Philosophical and Creative**

Vedas, particularly Rig-Veda is known for its creative and aesthetic poetry as well. Upanishads and texts of Shaddarshanas-Six Schools of Indian philosophy, including non believer Samkhya philosophy, Buddhist, Jainism, Atheist Lokayata are more of theoretical texts. These are all known to the world through translations. Apart from these philosophical texts, there is a rich heritage of Sanskrit creative literature as well.

- **Creative Sanskrit Literature**

Sanskrit has been language of philosophical and creative literature-both. Apart from Mahabhart, Ramayana and texts like Panchtantra and Hitopadesh, Sanskrit literature is known world over for its poetry and drama with Kalidas as most known name.

Shakespeare and Kalidas!

It is common refrain among literary critics in India to refer Kalidas as ‘Shakespeare of India’, though Kalidas lived nearly one thousand years before Shakespeare, that is why some critics will put it in reverse order as well-’Shakespeare as Kalidas of England’! Whatever way, it reflects the concept of ‘World Literature’ and also Comparative study of literature, which would never have been possible without translations of the texts.

- **Shakuntala Translation**

Translation of Abhigyan Shakuntalam in English was first done by William Jones in 1789 and after that by Sir Monier Williams in prose form in 1853, later more than 46 translations in twelve European languages appeared and now complete dramas and poetry collections of Kalidas are available in many English translations. English and other languages translations of many

other Sanskrit classic writers are also available like that of Bhavbhuti , Kiratarjun etc.

- **Contribution of Indian Creative Writing to World Literature**

Apart from classical Sanskrit literature, medieval period Indian literature is also known to the world, particularly Indian Bhakti movement poets like Kabir, Guru Nanak, Akka Mahadevi and many more through their translations. In modern period, big numbers of translations were done from Indian languages literatures. India has 22 national languages in 8th schedule of Indian constitution and 24 recognised by Sahitya Akademi-Academy of Letters for purpose of awarding annual best book prizes.

- **Translations of Mirza Ghalib**

Many scholars, even from non literary background have been fascinated by Mirza Ghalib's philosophical Urdu ghazals. Aijaz Ahmad and many other scholars and translators have rendered Ghalib's poetry and prose in English. Mirza Ghalib lived during 1857's first war of Independence of India and went through lot of hard times as well, but his poetry is claimed to be as national heritage by both India and Pakistan, though there was no Pakistan during Ghalib's times

- ***Goethe and Ghalib***

Goethe and Ghalib are two great poets of German and Urdu languages and there is a joke about a scholar, who was to read a paper on 'Goethe and Ghalib'. Joke is that after speaking every set of few lines, he would insert the words-'Goethe and Ghalib' in an international seminar, where no one knew the language in which he spoke.

Importance of Translation

Joke apart, this reference shows the importance of Translation both ways- the significance and comparison of two great poets of the west and east was possible only because of multilingual translation of great texts and the other way- if the language of a speaker is not understood due to lack of translation, it can lead to creation of such jokes to underline the importance of Translation as a very important tool of human communication.

- **Role of Translation in First Noble Prize of Literature to India**

Rabindranath Tagore, the most eminent Indian writer of Bengali language got Noble prize for literature in 1913, till now only Indian to receive this award for literature. Interesting part of this narrative is that Tagore himself translated 103 of his Bengali poems in English and took them to England in 1912.

- **Geetanjali...**

Tagore recited his translations in many gatherings and W.B Yeats, the great English poet was so impressed that he wrote forward to these poems and the small collection was published in English in 1913 as 'Geetanjali'. Tagore received the award same year for his Bengali poetry, but facilitated by his own English translation of the poems. Tagore's example of his own translation and Noble prize on it, underlines the significance of Translation as tool of literary communication in the world. Now almost all the Bengali writings of Tagore are available in English and many Indian languages translations, some in other world languages as well.

- **Premchand and ‘Godan’**

Premchand, a Hindi and Urdu writer, published his classic novel-Godan in Hindi and Urdu both, few months before his death. The novel based on the real life of Indian peasantry became Indian classic and has been twice translated into English.

- ***Godan.....***

Jai Rattan and P. Lal did first English translation of Godan in 1957, which became quite popular. Later Gordon C Roadarmel did English translation of Godan in 1968 as ‘The Gift of the Cow’, which is considered better than earlier one. The novel was selected by UNESCO to be translated into many world languages and so it has been. Apart from Godan, many other fiction writings of Premchand are now available in English and other languages. Ghalib, Tagore and Premchand represents India as the best faces of modern Indian literature on world literary scene.

- **Importance of Translation in Indian literary Scenario**

As mentioned earlier, India itself is storehouse of huge literature written in various Indian languages, which reaches other Indian languages through Inter- Indian languages translations. There are two major source languages of inter Indian literary translation-Hindi and English. Text of any Indian language is first translated into either Hindi or English and then through that medium it is translated into many more Indian languages.

- ***Inter Indian Languages Translations....***

Generally literature of North, West and East Indian languages like-Punjabi, Urdu, Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali, Assamese etc. is first translated into Hindi and then from that medium to many

other Indian languages. Translations from South Indian languages are generally done first in English and then from that medium, these are translated into other Indian languages. Southern languages are part of Dravidian linguistic group and other three regions languages are from Indo-Aryan linguistic group of languages.

These translations are done sometimes without the help of a medium language like Hindi or English too, like Tamil to Bengali or Marathi to Assamese etc. Sahitya Akademi by instituting National Translation Prize among inter Indian languages translations has encouraged this process as well. This author has also received National Translation Prize from Sahitya Akademi-Indian Academy of Letters, for Inter-Indian languages translation. The prize was given on Punjabi Poet Pash's translated poetry-Samay O' Bhai Samay(Time O' Brother Time) in Hindi by Chaman Lal for year 2001.

- **Revolutionary poet Pash and his poetry**

Pash created a niche for himself as trendsetter poet in the seventies as a radical poet. As he was against both Khalistani terrorism and state terrorism, he was assassinated by Khalistani terrorists on 23rd March, 1988. As a challenge I translated his Punjabi poetry in Hindi, which was published in different volumes, one of which mentioned above-Samay O' Bhai Samay'(Time O' Brother Time) ,published in 1993, was awarded National Translation Prize by Sahitya Akademi .

- **Translating Pash.....**

The range of Paash's poetry is quite wide and it has strong ideological connotations as well. So to translate Paash's poetry, one has not only to be good at both languages, one has to understand and comprehend his ideas and concerns as well.

Fortunately we were close to each other at ideological level, so I had the same passion as the poet had, to render the ideas very forcefully. Pash's poetry leaves a powerful impact upon its readers and it was a challenge for any translator, whether his or her translation can create the same impact or not, as the original poem creates.

Hindi translation of Pash clicked so much that poet became more popular in Hindi than his own mother tongue Punjabi. Many more translations were done from my Hindi translation of the poet in Marathi, Gujarati, Urdu, Bengali, Malayalam, Telugu etc., and thus designating him as major Indian poet rather than being just a Punjabi poet. His poetry was compared to Pablo Neruda by some critics, so bringing him to the scenario of world literature as English translations of his poetry were also done in due course of time.

- **Concluding.....**

By focussing on five major Indian writers of different languages from ancient and modern period of Indian society and looking at their status in world literature through translations, one can conclude by saying that there could have been no concept of world literature, had there been no translations. Neither Tagore would have won Noble prize, nor Indian literature would have been known to the world, nor would European/African/Chinese/Latin American/Russian or any other region's literature have known to India. So translation is the key to the concept and existence of world literature!

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- **Translations of Kalidas's Shakuntla**

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By CÁLIDÁS.

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5. NASHTANIR, 1901 - The Broken Nest (translated by Mary M. Lago and Supriya Sen)
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9. SARADOTSAVA, 1908 - Autumn Festival (tr. 1921)
10. RAJA, 1910 - The King of the Dark Chamber, 1914 (tr. by Rabindranath Tagore) - Pimeän kammion kuningas ja muita draamoja (suom. suom. J. Hollo)
11. GALPAGUCCHA, 1912 - A Bunch of Stories (translated by Monika Varma)
12. CHINNAPATRA, 1912 (expanded ed. CHINNAPATRABALI, 1960) - Glimpses of Bengal (tr. 1921)
13. VIDAY-ABHISAP, 1912 - The Curse at Farewell, (translated by Edward Thompson)
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26. CHATURANGA, 1916 - Quartet (tr. Kaiser Haq) / Chaturanga, a Novel (translated by Asok Mitra)
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28. SADHANA, 1916 - Sadhana: The Realisation of Life - Sadhana: elämän oleellistaminen (suom. J. Hollo)
29. Stray Birds, 1916 - Villilintuja: elämänviisautta (suomentanut Pertti Seppälä)
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