

LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 6 : 6 June 2006

Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.

Associate Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.

Sam Mohanlal, Ph.D.

B. A. Sharada, Ph.D.

A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D.

Lakhan Gusain, Ph.D.

Practicing Literary Translation

A Symposium by Mail

Round Eight

Moderator

V. V. B. Rama Rao, Ph.D.

**PRACTICING LITERARY TRANSLATION
A SYMPOSIUM BY MAIL – ROUND EIGHT**

Moderator : : V. V. B. Rama Rao, Ph.D.

"One's relationship to the original on one hand and to the language into which one translates on the other is in fact asymmetrical. Even reversed in mirror image, the left hand is not the opposite of the right hand: they are not identical. Thus, I attempt to make something in English that is no reflection of the original: nor is it a facsimile or copy. Roman copies of Greek statues are notoriously lifeless."

Jascha Kessler

Dr. L.S.R.Prasad

**PRACTICING LITERARY TRANSLATION,
(A Surgeon's perspective about its side effects and fringe benefits.)**

*Translation, it is that openeth the window, to let in the light;
That breaketh the shell that we may eat the kernel.....The Holy Bible 1b
Words are the soul's ambassadors, who go
Abroad upon her errands to and fro.....James Howell.*

A "performance in words" with an element of hysterical display, often entertaining the both worlds and the people on both sides, this literature has some thing in it, drawing all one and sundry into its fold.

The rest of the world just fades away like the morning mist at the arrival of the morning sun, when a literary work captures our attention. Especially when you are a poet or a writer the hitherto invisible spring in you begins its upward surge.

Original writers do live in the security zones with traditional and modern facilities and comforts of freedom and self-expression. May be it is a poem, or a good write up: "you don't chew it--macerate it—for an evening pleasure, for a Roman holiday. You touch it. You are aware that a good deal of it is missed." (Frost)

When that great work reaches and gets morphed in the hands of the translator and comes out ,the output is usually ,entirely and precisely satisfactory to the translator but more often, to the original writer it is a sickening and harrowing experience.

May be that's the reason why Sir John Denham said that translation should be attempted by a genius not less than the writer. "Translation increases the faults of a work and spoils its beauties," said Voltaire.

What is literature, if not the art from the heart? The imitative theory holds that art is an imitation of something .May be it is mimicry, representation or recreation or expression

of feelings or a way of arousing emotions but it draws a good deal of attention with a quantum of music.

And we know that most of our original works (in Telugu) of the past are translations. Though the literature itself is an imitation of the nature by the writer, a translator has to be necessarily and faithfully follow the footsteps of the creator. Horace gives some solace by giving this advice: "Nor, as a faithful interpreter, need you take pains to translate word for word."

The intricacies, idioms, clichés, dialects, slang, the thought processes and the original author's hidden ideas in the secret glyphs all are to be studied carefully before embarking into the thankless job of translating the other person's work.

*Some hold translations not unlike to be
The wrong side of a Turkey tapestry. . . James Howell.*

So translators are blamed, insinuated and warned in Italian style!

"Translators, traitors--traduttori, traditori"

In such a depressing situation, this man behind the screen must be brought to the fore front. A few doses of vaccine of encouragement is the order of the day. After all what do we gain or what do we lose? A little bit of bargained fame, a few joint pains, some inevitable eye strain, bed side bickering of the spouse, scattered books and papers filling the house, all ending up with a sneer and whimper from the original writer.

But what we lose literature gains.

At this juncture where less listeners and more speakers rule the roost, and as per the dictum of Macaulay, "as civilization advances, poetry almost necessarily declines." And to bring the readers and listeners back to square one, the translations of epics and legends into other languages serves a long cherished dream well. One must keep in mind that reading is an intellectual process, not a hypnotic exercise.

Dante's *Divine comedy* has similar tones in describing the hell, as faithfully as *Bhagavatham*, the most popular epic in India. *Bhagavatham* and *Devi Bhagavatham* explain the under world in Hindu perspective. Legends of this kind point out the similarities and common ties of the past ages, probably the roots.

As the tree of literature passing through its phases, the sprigs that are at the end point of the tree are unaware of their roots. And the language itself also has changed its attire. The literary works of ancient and medieval times have to be updated to suit the present day's needs (as is being done in the case of the Bible).

As per the evaluation of Indo-Anglican poetry and translations are concerned a national level committee comprising scholars and literary persons to supervise and advise new

entrants into this field, if formed, is always welcome. Some universities have post-graduate diploma courses in distant education format, in training the aspirants.

But much needs yet to be done. Translators of the world, unite! The future is yours.

Last word:

"Belinda-but you know we must return good for evil.

Lady Brute-that may be a mistake in the translation." *The Confederacy* by Sir John Vanbrugh.

Doctor Lanka Siva Rama Prasad (b.1955), a practicing Vascular surgeon by profession, has written ten books in Telugu and three in English including SHADES (poetry) and translated four more books into English and an abridged version of Bhagavatham is due for release. He is a regular contributor to the Telugu daily Andhra Jyothi "nivedana" on Upanishads. He is well versed in Animation cartooning, painting, and filmmaking.

I started this round with an epigraph from Kessler. Now, I quote, again, from Kessler's article in a periodical. Kessler is an American poet who has been translating poetry and fiction since 1972, working with Hungarian, Persian, Bulgarian and Finnish. About the nature of the translator's relationship to the original, he stated that the only relationship one can have is a *disinterested fidelity* to the poem or the story that opens itself to one in an English wording. He concludes his essay with this insightful observation:

"(But) if translation entails the enlargement of some aspects of our language, its vulgarization, distortion, even its transformation on occasion a strange and bizarre sounds, that is a risk one takes in the interest of ever larger accommodations, much as musicians have taken on other musics throughout history. English is still an expansive language, its possibilities various, open in so many ways that it is a wonderful instrument for translation. And translation is in fact the way we communicate with the hosts of exotics who make up the rest of the world, those foreigners who are both living and the historic dead. It is a way not merely of coming to know them intimately but of bringing everyone home – home to the future, towards which all of us have always headed."

Translating Exotic Poetry -*Art and poetry today*, Jan 2006, New Delhi

Kessler's practice is slightly different from that of the people I have known and that of the practitioners who have enriched this first-ever kind of a thing I braved to call A Symposium by Mail. He has been dealing in, as he rightly stated in the caption of his essay, "exotic' languages. Our practitioners have been dealing with Indian languages, now come to fashionably being referred to *bhashas*. But, for native speakers of English a translation from an exotic language (for them) like Telugu, requires a special skill to infuse life into 'the Roman copies of a Greek statue'. The wonderful fact is that our practitioners too are succeeding as my friend Kessler has always been. Now, I reiterate with a good deal of confidence what I have been saying all along: literary translation is

not as formidable as it is made out to be by some applied linguists who are not themselves practitioners of this generally slighted art.

Down the ages literary translation has been performing a unique function in the world of books comparable to archaeological surveys and protection of monuments, historical, spiritual and cultural. Scriptures, national epics and hoary literary artifacts are great treasures not just in the respective countries they were produced but for the entire civilized world. Indian scriptures are not scriptures for Indians alone once they went beyond the boundaries of states and continents to become the treasures of human civilization and thinking.

Literary translations of these texts are necessitated by the emergence of new readerships and the need to re-convey the texts to contemporary readership placed in changing milieus. Situations may demand rephrasing to bring the texts nearer to contemporary reality. New discoveries of critics/commentators may warrant a revision of existing, older translations. The limitations faced by earlier translators may have disappeared in the new situation of authorship and writing. Taboos may have disappeared or may have come in.

To all the distinguished participants I stand beholden for their generous support and participation. We are generally agreed on some points:

1. Literary translation is necessary and would be appreciated by those, though few, who have no access to the original language of an artifact.
2. Enthusiasm, sincerity and a reasonably good knowledge of any two languages would be the minimum requisite to embark on this practice.
3. No translation could be perfect to the extent of displacing the original.
4. No translation could be permanent and the best would recede when a better than 'best' appears.
5. Evaluating translated texts needs a good deal of *sahridaya* on the part of the evaluator, more so if he is not himself a practitioner.

Having said this much, let me try to give a more specific and constructive thrust to the symposium by raising some questions to be addressed by us:

1. Are there only unmitigated translation 'losses'? Isn't there some compensation too?

Our friend Professor Suresh Kumar argues that translation 'losses' are not without compensations. He has a hypothesis worth studying with a view to testing its validity with concrete examples from any two languages: for eg., English – Hindi, Telugu English, etc. His hypothesis stems from the Principle of Translation Analysis spelt out by Popovic. A., in his book *A Dictionary for the Analysis Of*

Literary Translation, Edmonton, University of Alberta, 1976. Translation Analysis opens up new vistas of assessing Literary Translation. A statement of the yet fluid hypothesis of Compensation" by Professor Kumar would be reproduced for discussion in the next round.

2. What are the 'limitations' in the rendering of a Western classic like, say *Divine Comedy*?

3. Would it be a 'travesty' to 'modernize' an ancient or medieval text?
4. Specifically, do we need an Indian theory of Literary Translation?
5. Is 'Collaborative' translation (of collaborators one being a native speaker of the T.L.) a cure-all or merely a protective phylactic?

The questions are just illustrative and are by no means exhaustive.

Addressing the fourth question first, one can always say, two heads are better than one. But the presence of a single source language speaker does not guarantee the full transmission of the sense and its shades to the target language collaborator. All said and done, this could only be some kind of a 'stamp or seal of quality' for whatever it is worth. Here is a sample of a Telugu verse in a kind of broad transcription and its English rendering in a mammoth collaborative exercise in literary translation. Let me hasten to add that I don't intend to sit in judgement. The idea is to show a reader who knows both languages to draw his own conclusions.

*goppalu ceppukoncu nanu kootiki panktiki raaku mancu
trippudu baapal andarunu tiTTiri kaavunan okkamaaru ee
appamulanni kappalayi annamu sunnamugaaga maarucun
pappunu shakamul pulusupaccadulun ciru raalu kaavutan*

Full of their own greatness, these lousy Brahmins
Insulted me and threw me out of their feast,
I'll turn their fried cakes into frogs,
Their rice into lice, and all the side dishes into fishes.

(*Poem at the Right Moment*, Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Schulman, OUP, 1993).

Every reader has his own perception of a translated text when it comes to understanding, comparing and assessing a text and his own intuition tells him when the text in his hands 'falls short'. But then, this would not be a stumbling block for him to go ahead till the very end. I may be permitted to remind our readers of Gayatri Spivak's statement quoted else where in this symposium.

Here are some more pointed questions which Arlene Zide posed to fellow practitioners passing on her views in her article:

Arlene Zide

As an American translating primarily from Hindi into English, the issue of neo-colonialism is often raised. Indeed, should Native English speakers be translating "bhasha"? Is this a neo-colonial or post-colonial act *at the expense of the regional languages*?

[Conversely, should Indians be translating English into Hindi, Bengali etc., or, for that matter, Bengali, or Santali or Tamil into Hindi?

To carry it further: should (in fact, *can*?) **men translate women** honestly, or accurately? After all, this also is part of a colonialization which has been carried on for much longer and far more tenaciously. (Is there something to be learned from male translations of women's work vs. women's translations? In teaching, I have often used the strikingly contrasting translations (e.g., one by Pritish Nandy and the other by Chitra Divakaruni) of Kobito Sinho's powerful poem about Eve. Divakaruni's translation is much truer to the original, while Nandy's goes its own idiosyncratic transcreative way.

Is translation into another language a "bad" thing or a good one, or, both?
Is translation of women by men a bad or good thing?
Can the translator ever truly understand the "other"?

Problems with this kind of attitude:

Is language in itself a colonial power, only when the objective is colonization rather than literary exchange? Is English an 'enemy' language? In 2005, i.e., not 1947, how many Indian speakers of English are there? Should they be FORCED to speak other languages? Which? Hindi"? (What about Tamils? Malayalis? Bengalis?) Does requiring Hindi in non-Hindi areas constitute a neo-colonial act? Does translation of poetry otherwise inaccessible to non-speakers of Hindi into English contribute to the power of English in India? If so what stops anyone from translating Hindi poetry into e.g. Santali? Oriya? Telugu? Tamil? Konkani? Kharia? Manipuri?

Is it US's 'fault' (or that of an individual from US) that English is so prevalent in the world or that there are many speakers in India etc. who LIKE to read translations from other languages? *de facto* situation vs. wishful thinking? Is it prejudicial within the languages themselves if translation *to* English occurs? JP Das said, hardly 300 copies sell of his poetry IN ORIYA IN ORISSA but he is widely read in translation into English (and Hindi!!!) in Delhi and elsewhere ...

What purpose/ end does *not* translating serve?

Does who translates matter (yes—

- A. At the literary level---- good translators / bad ones/ mediocre ones or strictly academic ones

- B. At the political level – what end? And does translation keep any of the original language readers from continuing to read in the original language?
- C. At the cultural level: yes --colonizing translations by "orientalists" and missionaries had a non-literary purpose.
- D. However, translating to convey cultural differences and nuances rather than reform and re-form them ... is very different. And in the interest of multi-cultural interaction and communication, understanding, and/or rapprochement? Isn't it a good thing, a worthwhile thing?

Arlene Zide has an M.A. and Ph.D. in Linguistics/ Hindi besides another M.A. in South Asian Linguistics. A poet, translator and linguist, she is Professor Emeritus Humanities, and Director, Women's Studies, City Colleges of Chicago.

Mangalam Ramamoorthi

Losses and gains in translations

In my summing up of my last issue, I said translation is not mundane work. It could be interesting and creative too.

Therefore, when I saw Dr.Rao's topic "Loss or Gains" I thought I must continue from where I stopped.

Of course there are people who say when we repeat the author's thoughts in other words, it kills the initiative in the translator. Thus, it is a loss of time and energy.

However, the idea is totally wrong. It is really a challenge to convey exactly the thoughts, which the author meant, not only in words but in spirit too. Again, it is extremely difficult to bring out the same circumstances in which the author wrote the piece. In that way it is really creative and speaks about the translator's skill about the presentation and the depth of his knowledge in that particular language.

Another thing- once the creation comes out of the author's pen, it starts having its own identity. It does not depend on its author's existence any more. (Editing is different.)

When the creation is in a single language, read by the same people over and over again, popular or unpopular in the same region, it becomes stagnant, even though it is good. It is not of much use to mankind in general as it is read only by a limited audience.

Translation infuses further life into it to be enjoyed elsewhere too.

Therefore, if any good creation should fly with its wings globally on a large scale it could only be through translations. Actually translations become the symbol of the popularity and they are the props for the stability, and longevity of the creation.

We can also assume the strength of a work by the number of languages into which it has been translated. As an example, we can point out '*The Bible*' and '*Bhagavat Gita*' for the number of translations and their popularity therefrom. In the modern times "The Autobiography of a Yogi" written (by Sri Paramahansa Yogananda) has been translated into 18 languages. Several dailies in Europe and America praised the book. One said:

"This book could create a spiritual revolution."

This revolution may not be possible but for the translations. Incidentally, I have had the privilege of translating it into Tamil.

In good translation we must be able to find the same sentiments, anger, twists and swirls as in the original. It is very difficult and a challenge too as I have already mentioned. By these translations we cannot deny that the heritage and the culture depicted in the original speak individually and historically.

Here is a word of caution: the work may be spiritual, social, work of fiction or even comedy. If there is much of local color in that, that may be missing in the translation. This is unavoidable. The more general the work is the more interesting may be the translation and not much would be missed by the target language reader.

Mangalam Rama Moorthi is a renowned translator with lots of published work to her credit.

V. V. B. Rama Rao, Ph.D.
C-7 New Township, BTPS Badarpur
New Delhi - 110 044
India
vvbramarao@yahoo.com