

POLITICS OF TRANSLATION: A CASE STUDY OF TWO HIGHLY ACCLAIMED HINDI NOVELS

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Abstract

The concept of translation, at present, is not just the linguistic change from Source Text to Target Text. It is a serious political act. The politics of translation involves complex issues like cultural and linguistic colonialism, hegemony, resistance, untranslatability, and alternative uses of language. It is worth quoting here Tejaswini Niranjana's observations "Translation both shapes and takes shape within the asymmetrical power relations of the power that operate under colonization" It is only after the globalization that English has begun to claim a disproportionate share of the total output of translation in India. It occupies an elevated position because it is not only a language that reaches only every nook and corner of India, it is also a global language, which gives the translated literature a potentially wide readership. Hindi is the most widely spoken language in India, especially northern and central India. But readers from South India and North-Eastern India has an arm's-length relationship with Hindi literature. Hence, to know Hindi literature they have to depend mainly on the English translated texts. A few texts though are available in English translation, there are many texts that have not been translated yet. This omission of good many texts is a matter of concern. Now is the time to explore the politics behind for leaving the important texts untranslated. To go to the dense of the matter I have made a case study of two novels by two Hindi novelists from UP: *Kashi ka Assi* by Kashinath Singh and *Amrit and Vish* by Amrit Lal Nagar. None of these texts are yet available English translation. Kendra Sahitya Akademi Awardee Kashinath Singh's highly acclaimed novel, *Kashi ka Assi*, which has been recently adopted for a film not yet been translated into English. The story goes through the events of 1990 and 1998 including Ram Janmabhoomi movement and Mandal Commission implementation in Banaras, India. Singh has added real people with real conversation in this novel. Hence, the question arises that in spite of being such a realistic story of a real *ghat* of India, why this novel has not been translated yet for a wide readership. Here it is needful to explore what politics works behind in the selection of such texts for translation. The same case is with Amrit Lal Nagar, who is often regarded the true heir of Munshi Premchand. His novel *Amrit and Vish* has been translated into Russian by Moscow's Hindi scholar, S. Trunikova and published in Moscow. However, Indian scholars or even Sahitya Akademi has not felt any need to translate it into English. This paper will delve into the reasons of such omissions, on the light of these two novels.

Keywords: Translation, Hindi literature, Kashinath Singh, Amrit Lal Nagar.

Bassnett and Trivedi has quoted Octavio Paz in their article on translation who rightly claims that “translation is the principal means we have of understanding the world we live in”)Bassnett and Trivedi 3(. Yes, it is through translation that we are able to read and understand what is happening throughout the world. The concept of translation, at present, is not just the linguistic change from Source Text to Target Text it is much more. It is a serious political act that encompasses translation from one language to another, conversion from one medium to another, and also moving from one place to another. The politics of translation involves complex issues like cultural and linguistic colonialism, hegemony, resistance, and alternative uses of language. Originally, translation was considered a univocal discipline. However, in contemporary perspective translation means translation of cultural, political and historical contexts and concepts rather than mere linguistic ones. According to Homi Bhabha “Translation is the performative nature of cultural communication”)Correa and Owens 137(. Eugene Nida defines translation as the transfer of message from source language to target language without losing meaning and following the original style. Translation is often an ethnographic project but is politically charged with great significance. It is worth quoting here Tejaswini Niranjana’s observations:

“Translation both shapes and takes shape within the asymmetrical power relations of the power that operate under colonization”)Tejaswini(

To have a comprehensive idea of one culture, one has to go through its literature. However, it is not possible for one to read every literature without the translated version of that particular literature. So, translations have always occupied a primary position in our culture. In recent times translation activities have seen an upsurge with various government funded bodies and private publishing houses playing a nurturing role. Translation of vernacular literature into English is one of the major affairs in India today. It is only after the globalization, that English has begun to claim a disproportionate share of the total output of translation in India. It occupies an elevated position because it is not only a language that reaches only every nook and corner of India, it is also a global language, which gives the translated literature a potentially wide readership.

Indian English writers, no doubt, can give a wider readership of Indian Literature. But, for a holistic idea of the Indian culture one cannot deny the importance of India’s Vernacular literature. Indian *Bhasha* writers, who are closer to the soil can give a clearer understanding of what Indian literature is compared to Indian writing in English. But it is not possible to give a wide readership to its vernacular literature without translation, because in India in every region different languages are spoken and understood. Hindi is the most widely spoken language in India, especially northern and central India. But readers from South India or Northeastern India have an arm’s-length relationship with Hindi literature. Hence, to understand Hindi literature they have to depend mainly on the English translated versions. In such case, if the number of translated texts is minimal, their knowledge of this literature remains partial. Thus, such readers, are deprived of the vast range of gems of Hindi Literature.

English is the only language which is understood in every part of India. No other language can go in every nook and corner of India and the world at large. So, translation into English proves more helpful than translation within the regional languages. In the last ten years, we see, that, many landmark Hindi novels and short stories have been translated into English. Good many a number of Premchand’s works are available in English now. Among others are Kamaleshwar’s *Kitne Pakistan*, Vinod Kumar Shukla’s *Khilega to Dekhenge* and *Naukar ki*

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Kameez, Shrilal Shukla's *Raag Darbari*, Yashpal's *Jhoota Sach*, Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas* etc. are also available in English. These novels capture a true picture of the Indian society of colonialism and aftermath. However, the number of translated texts is not enough to satisfy the curiosity of a non-Hindi reader. A few texts though are available in English, there are many other important texts that have not been translated yet. This omission of a good many texts is a matter of concern. This is the time to explore the politics behind for leaving the important texts untranslated. To go to the dense of the matter I have made a case study of two Hindi novelists from UP: Kashi Nath Singh and Amrit Lal Nagar. Kashinath Singh's "*Kashi ka Assi*" and Amrit Lal Nagar's *Amrit and Vish*, though, highly praised by the readers, none of these texts is yet available in English translation.

Kendra Sahitya Akademi Awardee Kashinath Singh's widely acclaimed novel, *Kashi ka Assi*, which has been adopted for a film in 2015, yet not translated into English. The movie, however, still banned in India. The story of the novel goes through the events in 1990 and 1998 including Ram Janmabhoomi movement and Mandal Commission implementation in Banaras, the cultural city of India. Singh has also added real people with real conversation in this novel. Assi ghat of Varanasi is the setting of the novel. In the intellectual fields of Assi, the Babri Masjid demolition and the breakup of the USSR were fresh in discussions. The milieu of this now globalized city where foreigners seen roaming all around learning classical art, music or dance and the local upper caste Brahmins who have become commercialized with growing change of economy are realistically represented by Singh in this novel. Hence, the question arises that in spite of being such a realistic story of a real *ghat* of India, why this novel has not seen the light of translated yet for a wide readership? Is it the very quality of its realistic presentation that hinders it to be translated? Is there any force behind who doesn't want the reality to come before people? Or it is because of the general notion that best Indian literature is "untranslatable"? Is it on the part of the reader that they "pay scant attention to translated works" or any other political reason? This is matter of concern to see such a realistic Indian novel is still inaccessible to most readers.

The same case is with Padma Bhusan Amrit Lal Nagar, who is often regarded the true heir of Munshi Premchand. His novel *Amrit and Vish* has been translated into Russian by Moscow's Hindi scholar, S. Trunikova and published in Moscow. However, Indian scholars or even Sahitya Akademi has not felt any need to translate it into English. *Amrit and Vish* is set in Lucknow, the capital city of India situated at the bank of River Gomti. The story is set in the backdrop of Indo-China war of the 1960s. It is a social novel depicting the life of the people in an urban locality of Lucknow struggling against poverty, avarice, superstition and moral degradation towards social progress. For its wide sweep of imagination, its realistic portrayal, narrative power, and vigour, it has been hailed as an outstanding contribution to contemporary Hindi literature. The novel portrays the contemporary social life with all its eccentricities. It is saga novel based on the reminiscences of the older generation and on the experiences of the author's own generation, covering almost the whole of twentieth century. The novel presents a panorama of multifarious types of characters originating from the families of feudal lords, nawabs, emerging bourgeois, the neo-rich class and the bureaucracy, the middle class, the lower middle class and the downtrodden, they represent both the trends-- virtuous and vicious. While depicting the younger generation, the author has clearly illustrated the new facts of our life that the younger generation display. Though they seem to possess an uncontrolled, unchannelized and anarchistic

revolutionary fervor, nevertheless, their activities and tendencies reflect their deep love and concern for human justice, equity and conscience. This novel is even important from historical point of view too. But the fact of its out of translation yet into English is rather a matter of shock.

A little survey makes it clear that various politics are at work in the process of translation. In an interview published in *The Hindu*, the author of *Kashi ka Assi* makes fun of the people's reaction to the publication of this book: "I was threatened with death, my limbs would be severed. I had a whole bunch of people after my life")Rashid(. Such reaction arose because he has criticized the growing communalism and the act of Babri Masjid demolition. He also talked to *The Indian Express* after receiving Sahitya Akademi Award for his second novel *Rehan Par Reggu*: "I had lost hope of getting any award for *Kashi Ka Assi*. It was a popular novel but was often dismissed because of liberal use of the language with local flavour. Logon ne use gaaliyon ka pulinda hee man liya (people dismissed it as a collection of abuses). But now, I am extremely happy to receive the award for a work that underlines the impact globalization is having on villages. Perhaps it is a fact that the field of literature is dominated by elitism. Otherwise, the novel *Kashi Ka Assi* was more popular" (Pandey). This elitism is at work not only on award giving but also on the act of translation too. It is not devoid of hegemony. The elite group makes the hierarchy of literature according to their own ideology and marginalize this kind of novel. They promote those works they want people to read and leave the other, which opposes their ideology. The politics of translation is not a recent aspect; it is at work as remote from the colonial period. The European colonizers translated the oriental texts for the purpose of expansion, now this new group of colonizers does it for their own motif. Some condemn these two novels as "untranslatable" because of the use of colloquial and slang words. The novelist Siddhartha Chowdhuri expressed his view about *Kashi ka Assi*: "a brilliant and ribald look at communalism and Indian political scene around the time of Babri Masjid demolition. Brave and politically incorrect. Untranslatable")Hasan(. Thus, it becomes clear that untranslatability of literature depends on its political correctness not on linguistics correctness. It is the very reason of being revolutionary in nature which makes a work "untranslatable".

Another reason is that we the Indian English readers have an obsession with English literature. We generally look down Hindi literature or any other vernacular literature compared to English. The English and the Hindi literature does not meet on equal terms in our minds, which is another reason for this poor number of translation of Hindi Literature. One can, however, ignore the fact that the quality of the many translated output is not satisfactory one and it is also because "publishers do not take the trouble to source good translators or invest sufficiently in translated works,")Tribune(said Ira Pande in her interview. She also blames Sahitya Akademi for failure in promoting vernacular literature through translation. *Katha Books* has done a good job in establishing a platform for publication of indigenous literature in translation. India needs more such publishers who dedicate to publish more and more regional works in translation. Finally, being an interested reader of Indian literature, I hope more and more good translated works to come in English in near future.

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