Historical Survey of Translation Studies in India

Translation Studies (TS) has emerged as a much sought after discipline in the present time. Teachers, scholars and students from various disciplines have contributed to its growth. Most of the major universities and institutions around the world also have established TS departments/centers to promote research in the field. According to one study, in 1960 there were 49 university-level institutions that offered degrees in translation and/or interpreting; that number increased to 108 in 1980 and to at least 250 in 1994 (Caminade and Pym 283).

As a result of these developments and improved global communication, many national and international associations of translators have been formed. These associations bring their members together to facilitate dialogue about translation. Publishers, too, consider TS a blooming discipline. Mona Baker says that in May

1991, she received a phone call from Simon Bell, former Language Reference Editor at Routledge who wanted to know whether she had any suggestion for a reference work on TS, possibly a dictionary because he, “among many others, had begun to see translation studies as an exciting new discipline” (xiv). Today, there is hardly any publisher that has not published some book(s) on translation. However, it is only after the 1970s that TS became an academic discipline. Before that, TS existed in the form of translation views and theories (TVT).

**Historical Survey of TVT and TS in India**

From antiquity to the present, most translation in India has been a kind of “new writing,” giving some creative liberties to the translator (Das 58). A translation may be considered fine if it preserves the sense of the Source Language (SL) text. Therefore, at times, adaptation, paraphrase and “transcreation” fall into the overall category of translation. From this standard, a translator should preserve linguistic features but primarily, he should go for the soul (content and form/structure) of the SL text. If translation is performed carefully on these parameters, translation will be creative and the translator will become “co-creator.”

*Anuvaad (Anuvaada)* is the accepted equivalent of the English word, “Translation,” in Hindi. It comes from the Sanskrit word *Anuvaadah* which literally means “Repetition in normal use; Repetition in order to support, exemplify or explain; Explanatory repetition or mentioning of already said talk (message)” (Apte 41-42, my literal rendition). Etymologically, the word *Anuvaad* is a combination of the root word “*Vaad,*” meaning a statement or argument, and the prefix “*Anu,*” meaning “After; following” (Apte 35).

There can be one more theory about the word, *Anuvaad*. In religious and philosophical tradition in India, scholars did intralingual and interlingual *Teekaa* [Hindi word meaning interpretation/explanation] of Sanskrit works in two ways: as a commentary and as an interpretation or paraphrase. For the latter, they used the term *bhaashyaanuvaad* where *bhaashya* meant ‘linguistic.’ Perhaps it is from this word that scholars dropped the prefix ‘*bhaashya*’—maybe casually in the beginning and willingly later—since interpretation or paraphrase is itself a linguistic activity.

Many Indian scholars believe that translation in India has been practiced “for a long time without giving it such a name or style” (Mukherji 25). In this line, Lachman M. Khubchandan considers Narada, a character from Hindu mythology, as the first example of a transmitter of “the desired message” from one place to another without any distortion of the meaning (46). For him, Narada highlights “a subjective input in the role of an interpreter in intercultural settings” (ibid). Mr. Khubchandan also refers to another religious figure, i.e. “the image of evercontented Buddha, rejoicing with raised arms, in his role as a transmitter of message: ‘Yes, I know! It’s always a great feeling to have delivered the message one has come to deliver!’” (ibid).

Another Indian scholar, Sujeet Mukherji, believes that translation in India began from the telling or writing of literary compositions from one language to another. Usually it was from the master language, Sanskrit, to *bhaashaas—*modern languages like Hindi, Asamiya, Bangala, and Gujrati. Unlike the Biblical translation tradition in the West [discussed later in the chapter], SL texts were not primarily religious scriptures like the Vedas or the Upnishads, but “*Kavya* [poetic] works such as the *Ramayana*, the *Purana* works such as the *Srimad- Bhagavat*, and *itihahasa-purana* works such as the *Mahabharata*” (Mukherji 25-26). The best example of this tradition can be seen in Tulasi Das’ *Ramcharitmaanasa* (1575-1577), which is a poetic retelling/adaptation/translation of Valmiki’s *Ramayana* in Hindi from Sanskrit.

Still this telling or writing “can only loosely be regarded as translation, because, while the basic story remained same, some of it was left out and a lot of new writing [was] done to fill it out again” (Mukherji 26). This view is also shared by K. Ayappa Panikar, another Indian scholar, in his article, “The Anxiety of Authenticity: Reflections on Literary Translation” (66-76).

During the Mughal period in India, translation practice shifted from Sanskrit-to- *bhaashaas* towards Sanskrit-and-*bhaashaas-*to-Persian as Persian was “the ruler’s language” (Mukherji 26). Akbar in the 16th century “set up a *maktab khana* or translation bureau in order to make available the classics of Indian thought in Persian” and got translated the *Mahabharata*, the *Yogavasistha*, the *Harivamsa*, the *Srimad-Bhagavat*, the *Singhasan Battisi*, the *Ramayana*, and many works on Indian music into Persian (Behl 92). Badauni translated the *Ramayana* into Persian in four years with much reluctance, but when the translation was complete, it was so good that Akbar gave him, again against his will, another task of the “complete Persian translation of the *Atharvaveda*” (Behl 93).

After Akbar, his great grandson Dara Shikoh continued this tradition of translating Hindu works into Persian. Dara Shikoh got fifty *Upnishads* (entitled *Sirr-i-Akbar*)*,* the *Bhagvad Gita,* and the *Yogavashishtha Ramayana* translated into Persian with the help of a team of translators. Aditya Behl notes that it is *Sirr-i-Akbar* that “became the basis of Europe’s idealist philosophers’ discovery of the East after Anquetil-Duperron translated it into Latin in 1801” (91).

But, it was with the coming of East India Company in India that translation from Indian languages (especially Sanskrit) to European languages (especially English) began. At first, Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of East India Company in India from 1773 to 1785, had Indian *Dharamashaastraas*, which were originally written in Sanskrit and then translated into Persian, translated into English. It was also with Hastings’ encouragement that Charles Wilkins in 1785 translated the *Bhagavad Gita* first time into English; Hastings wrote the Preface to this translation (reprinted in Allen and Trivedi 170-74). Later, in 1789, William Jones translated *Shakuntala* directly from Sanskrit into English.

During the reign of the East India Company, this translation tradition also gave rise to Indology. In 1800, Fort William College in Kolkata (earlier Calcutta) was set up to teach Indian languages and culture to the East India Company writers. “The first round of language to be cultivated included Hindi and Urdu, Bangala and Marathi” (Mukherji 27). Though the purpose of this learning was not academic but business, it must have helped the *bhaashaas-*to-English translation tradition. However, up until the late 18th and the 19th centuries, SL for the translations of Indian literature into English still was mostly Sanskrit, and these translations were usually accomplished by British and American scholars (Mukherji 28). But by the latter part of the 19th century, many Indians had started translating from Indian languages into English. Tagore’s 1913 Nobel Prize for Literature winner translation of his own *Gitanjali* into English from Bengali is one example. In 1910, India’s first book on translation theory, *The Art of Translation* by R. Raghunath Rao, also appeared (Sinha 256).

Even after India gained Independence from British rule in 1947, English continued to work as an official language (with Hindi) throughout India. Thus translation became more important in the post-independence period, and scholars started taking it more seriously and systematically. In the 1960s, things changed to the extent that translators and translation theorists like P. Lal declared that they “strongly believe that, all other things being equal, an Indian is better equipped to translate India’s sacred works than a foreigner” (*Transcreation* 29)1 .

Lal also suggested a new translation method which he called “Transcreation.” By Transcreation, he meant “recreating an SL text in the target language taking absolute liberty with it and yet being fidel with it” (Das 62). In other words, transcreation advocated fidelity to the SL text as far as the soul (meaning/sense/information) and form is concerned but it also gave much space for the translator’s creative faculties. Das quotes four famous works which further bear this testimony of transcreating: the translations of *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* into English by R.K. Narayan and Chakravarti Rajagopalachari respectively; and the two anthologies, *New Writing in India* (1974) edited by Adil Jussawalla, and *Another India* (1990) by Nissim Ezekiel and Meenakshi Mukherjee (eds.) (ibid). Lal especially recommended this method when “the languages concerned are as distant as the Indian languages and English” (Lal, “Preface” 5).

The 1980s was the first time that Sahitya Akademi, an Indian government organization devoted to the development/preservation of languages and literatures in India, felt a need to initiate a systematic dialogue among the various academic and non-academic translators and translation theorists from all parts of India. To accomplish this project, it organized four workshops from 1986 to 1988 on literary translation for Indian translators across India. The proceedings of these workshops were later published in 2007 (Panikar, *Making of Indian Literature*).

As translation theories developed in the West, especially in the last thirty years, they also affected TVT/TS in India. It is during this period that TVT/TS in India and the West came a little closer. Though no significant research on the linguistic level has been accomplished in India, interdisciplinary research focusing on theoretical frameworks and power relations in translation marks its presence. Two major figures that are known internationally as translators and/or translation theorists in this phase are Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Harish Trivedi.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has contributed to TS both as a translator and as a theorist. As a translator, she has translated Jacques Derrida from French, and Mahasweta Devi and some other writers from Bengali into English. Theoretically, she takes three stands on translation, one of a feminist and others of a poststructuralist and a postcolonialist. Her 1992 essay “The Politics of Translation” is one essay in which her all these three stands appear. In the essay, she explicitly “outlines a poststructuralist conception of language use” and “argues that translators of Third World literatures need this linguistic model” (Venuti, “1990s” 338). In the essay, she also talks about her translation practices (187-88) and considers translation as “the most intimate act of reading” (Spivak 178).

Harish Trivedi’s position on translation, on the other hand, is that of a theorist. He judges translation primarily on the scale of postcolonial theory. For him, translation is a site for postcolonial experiment. His first such experiment is his 1999 book (co-edited with Susan Bassnett), *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, which contains nine essays by theorists and translators from around the world. Kate Sturge notes that in his 2005 study “Translating Culture vs. Cultural Translation,” he moves some more steps ahead in this experiment. Here, he not only accuses Homi Bhabha, another critic of postcolonial theory, “of marginalizing bilingualism and translation as specifically interlingual practices, the precondition for polylingual cultural diversity,” but also warns against the notion of cultural translation (Sturge 69). While theorists hail the interdisciplinary development of TS, Harish Trivedi, in his 2007 article, sees this particular development as somewhat threatening to TS. He argues that

Given the usurpation that has taken place, it may be time for all good men and true, and of course women, who have ever practiced literary translation, or even read a translation with any awareness of it being translation, to unite and take out a patent on the word “translation”, if it is not already too late to do so (Trivedi 285; Baker and Saldanha xxi).

His warning is legitimate, especially when TS has entered a phase of a kind of “Indeterminism” where TS has no single direction (Pym 1).

Apart from Spivak and Trivedi, there are two other translators/translation theorists who have also shown their presence internationally with their translation research/books. They are Tejaswini Niranjana and Rita Kothari.

Tejaswini Niranjana is both a translator and a translation theorist. She translates from Kannad into English, and her *Siting Translation: History, Poststructuralism, and the Colonial Context* (1992) is a much appreciated poststructuralist and postcolonial intervention in the field of TS. In the last chapter of this book, she also opposes the translation theory of A. K. Ramanujan, another well known translator from India, in his approach to translate a poem’s “inner and outer forms” faithfully as he thinks it impossible to translate the syntax of one language into the other (Viswanatha and Simon 173; Dharwadker 114). For Ramanujan, translation means being a creative and well crafted piece while Tejaswini Niranjana, like a poststructuralist and postcolonialist, believes that the translated text should disrupt the text to show “the contemporary difficulty ... in modes of cultural exchange” (Noor 607; Viswanatha and Simon 173).

Like Ms. Niranjana, Rita Kothari is also a translator and a translation theorist. As a translator, her translation of a novel by Joseph Macwan entitled *The Stepchild: Angaliyat* into English was short-listed for the Crossword-Hutch Prize.

Her theoretical approach to translation, however, is multidisciplinary, and it is perhaps because of this kind of critical approach that one reviewer in *Meta* expressed about her 2003 book, *Translating India: the Cultural Politics of English,* that “it is the most impressive book on translation in India I have [he has] ever read” (Jianzhong 173). In its innovative approach, the book uses both written documents and oral interviews to discuss TS in India. Furthermore, it not only talks about translation history and translation in academia but also gives a voice to the publishers and many regional translators. In fact, it addresses many new questions about TS in India—production, reception and marketability; TS courses and class room teaching; and the issues of adaptation and transcreation are some of them2 .

Thus, to conclude this historical survey of TVT and TS in India, it can be said that TVT and TS in India has come a long way. As more and more scholars from different fields of studies are taking scholarly interest in it, chances are that in future it may hike to a new peak.