

POLITICS OF TRANSLATIONS AND GENRE: SEEKING KANNADA POETRY TRANSLATIONS DURING COLONIAL PERIOD

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ABSTRACT

The role of genre in translations is an interesting area to be probed. Politics of choosing a kind of genre can state the attitude of translator. Cultural intrusions are made in the translations in many ways. This paper tries to enquire whether the choice of genres would mean social impact. The translators deliberately might choose certain genres. In other words, here is a space for cultural politics.

The growth of modern Kannada poetry is linked with translation activity during the colonial period. The form of poetry is perceived in a new form.

KEYWORDS: Genre, Cultural Politics, Social Impact

INTRODUCTION

The modern Kannada literature is said to have developed with the interaction of the western literature. The colonial rule paved way for English interaction. The missionary enterprises of collecting data of the native literature and language have already established a ground for Kannada- foreign relationship. The British rulers in order to establish a good communication and to accelerate the administration, assigned translation work to some of the natives. Besides, wide spreading of English Education in the whole country brought some changes among the natives. The newly emerging class of the modern nation wished to perform the role of reformation in the native societies. So translation activity was pushed by all these corners.

While discussing about tragedy and comedy in his poetics, Aristotle discussed about genre (genres=types) Even then, it is for the sake of identifying literary forms for a study, genre is considered as a necessary category. As M.H.Abrams writes, “Current theorists conceive genres as social formations on the model of social institutions, such as the state or church, rather than on the model of biological species. By structuralist critics, a genre is conceived as a set of constitutive conventions and codes, altering from age to age; but shared by a kind of implicit contract between writer and reader. These codes make possible the writing of a particular literary text, though the writer may play against as well as with, the prevailing conventions. In the readers, these conventions generate a set of expectations, which may be the controverter rather than satisfied, but enable the reader to make the work intelligible –that is, to naturalize and ordered by codes in the prevailing culture”(Abrams 2000 p.109-110). As Todorov argues, “In a society, the recurrence of certain discursive properties is institutionalized, and individual texts are produced and perceived in relation to the norm constituted by that codification. A genre, literary or otherwise, is nothing but this codification of discursive properties”(Todorov).

Hence genre is an important tool in social and cultural studies. As an extended surface of the meaning, it can also be extended to translations also.

In translations, genres are treated as most crucial choices. During translations subject, area and registers account more in a target language. Every translation indeed, is thoughtful about the structural features of the target language. If a translator brings out translation of a source text in a target language, he/she may seek proper genres available in a target language. Sometimes, translators' modify the source genre and produce hybrid texts.

In the Indian context, colonial contact zone might have given the chance to re-forming certain genres. When translations were used as strategies by the European rulers, it must have high political intentions. The rulers who were presupposed to construct texts of the native, they were trying to create target texts of their own 'type'. From the other side, the native translators who were trying to create source texts from other languages like English, they imitated certain genres which were not in the native tradition. In the most expressive forms like poetry and drama, they tried the new forms through translations altering the ancient types.

English education brought changes in the native lives. The impact of English education made the natives to produce new genres of new taste. Indeed, new genres like novel generated a new class as it happened in England.

During the colonial period, English was occupying the master position. The cultural power of Sanskrit as a language has been acting simultaneously when English translations are set in the native languages. Culture differs in the western context. Therefore, there is a cultural hand in adapting genres in the native language. B.M Shrikantayya, who proclaimed a new kind of poetic genre in Kannada, spoke of negotiation between Sanskrit and English. According to him, English has to uplift the Kannada poetry at the same time Sanskrit has to scrutinize Kannada poetry. He claimed that English poetry was grown stout with the inclusions of Greek, Latin, German, French and Sanskrit. If this amalgamated constitution gets translated into Kannada, it would be rich and lead a good poetry.

In Kannada, translations are visibly held during the colonial period. There is no distinguishing thing in their Sanskrit translations since Sanskrit has long been done as a maternal source language to all Indian languages. But the colonial impact on the Indian languages catalyzed the action of translation among them. The regional languages have been, indeed, externally pressurized from English education. So translation becomes the pan Indian phenomenon. Also, it inspired the Indian languages to share the common stock of modernity. Therefore, Kannada was able to receive translations from Bengali, Telugu, and Marathi and so on. These regional languages have similar features to share. For all of them, other than Sanskrit, English, and the then ruling language became the model to reconstruct their native societies. The author of 'Bhranthi Vilasa' (1876), B.Venkatacarya, in his preface to the translated novel, claimed that the novel form has been first popularized by him.

In the case of poetry, Kannada translations get slow. Since poetry is the oldest form of native literature, experimentations on the form is not desired high. Far from the beginning of literary history, poetry occupied prestigious position in Kannada. It was circulated among the common as well as the court people equally. The nineteenth century tendency of translations was towards forms like drama and the novel. The newly establishing class during the colonial period liked the playful, modern versions of drama and the novel. They expect newness in poetry as well. So there might be urge of searching a new form of poetry to fulfill the taste of the new class.

Earlier the missionary people translated poetry from the Bible. They were communal and suffered from jerks. Religious attitude of this kind of poetry was visible and the natives hardly turned to this kind. The missionary's attitude is deliberate and authoritative. So it has nothing to do with new poetry with the matter of content. But the missionary translations helped the structural shifts in the modern poetry.

The secular trend of poetry only developed early in the twentieth century. Love, courtship, personal emotions, passions are given scope in the subjective poetry. And this kind of poetry is liked by the newly educated class. The poetry form is modified and made flexible in its structure. In fact, poetry form is renovated in colonial translations.

The translations are of two kinds: of text book orientation and of generating new taste among the educated class. Text books are intended by both the Missionaries and the British government to enhance the availability of texts to the native students. A report of the Director of Public Inspection Bombay expressed regret over non availability of Kannada texts in the North Karnataka region. It runs like this: "The canarese language has never been taught and cultivated in this Division, as the Gujarathi and Marathi in theirs... in this Division, Canarese books(and masters) are only in course of preparation"(1865-66 Appendix, p.48, 49 and 62). In old Mysore region, due to colonial exposure, translation occurred with deliberate intent. S.G.Narasimhacharya and Panje Mangeshrao and other early Kannada translators have the attitude of providing good poetry texts for the native students through their translations. Their option laid on English literature. The nursery rhymes for Kannada children, common prayer songs for everyone, common life philosophy for man-are covered in the early poetry translations. S.G.Narasimhacarya's translation of 'Twinkle twinkle little star how I wonder what you are?' for children was popular. Poetry piece from Shakespeare's 'The Merchant of Venice' (Quality of mercy is so strained....) has been translated by Hattangadi Narayanarao for Kannada Book II for school students. There are many more examples of this kind.

The Romantic and the Victorian poetry inspired the newly educated people. Many translations catch the subjective zeal of the above mentioned poetry. The aspiration for good, secular poetry is fulfilled in these translations.

The poetry form in translations gets structural shifts. B.M.Shree, while translating poems from English, expressed that, "I want to sing a song by exchanging the dress of that girl to this girl". Though content is very attractive, there are structural challenges like metre. Most of the native translators express the impossibility of bringing English poetry to Kannada because of the meter difference. The English rhyme and rhythm and meter bothered the native translators much. Therefore they adapted altogether different versions of meter. They made use of the native 'layas' and modified them to modern poetic meter which can be suitable to new poetry. The rising of new Kannada language (Kannada has three language diachronic stages called ancient, medieval and the modern) is trying new form of poetry without giving up the old versions. Dwipadis, Tripadisand Chaupadis are meant for stanzas. The second line rhyme which is always a feature of Kannada poetry has been distorted; sometimes removed. Blank verse is welcomed and modified in Kannada poetry as 'SaralaRagale' (Simple Raghata form).

B.M.Shree's 'English Geetagalu' (1921) is an epoch making publication of translated English poems in Kannada. The cultural sway, it has made upon the Kannada educated class is really overwhelming. There is a clear shift in this collection. From the point of culture it is selective. The attitude of new generations well expressed. B.M.Shree is careful enough to harmonize the culture questions in his translations. He selected carefully the common human issues. Even though a poem like 'Alau Britania' (Rule England Rule) is there in the collection, it has sprung out of great stock of love

and respect to the ruling colonial government. B.M.Shree's translations proclaimed the arrival of new poetry which has amalgamated essence inside.

The Kannada poetry after receiving good number of translations from English was able to produce a new kind of poetry (Navodaya). This poetry exercised new metrical forms and lyrical forms as well.

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