



My Grandfather's Shop - a Space for Culture and Translation

Everybody is fond of grandpa. He was my best friend. I used to tease him and he used to scold me. But I had understood him better than his sons and daughters. Apart from our daily fun and playing, I had acquired a linguistic treasury from my Grandpa for which I am indebted to him forever. And now I could realize that this treasury is much of translation. While contemplating translation activities in early Western Odisha, I could see my grandfather reading/reciting many popular mythological texts amidst learned and like-minded people of my village. He had a shop and shop is a space of interaction, people from various classes, castes used to come to my grandpa's shop, somebody would address him as *kaakaa* (uncle), *daadaa* (elder brother), somebody else as *angyaa*. He was one of the learned men in my village. In his shop, he had Bhaagabata, Baidehishabilaasha, Ramayana and many other texts. He didn't know that these texts were transcreations. There was no translation issue to be discussed. The discussion was on various themes of the story and their sociocultural implication. Transcreated texts had become the original texts. Whenever he was getting time, he would best utilize the time in reading/reciting these texts. In those days, there were places in villages where such activities were going on. Still in some places, it has been going on.

When I write "translation activities", I include interpretation, transcreation, and adaptation under it. All these activities are different from one another. One of the basic differences is translation; transcreation and adaptation deal with the written text whereas interpretation deals with the spoken form. There was no rigid classification of these phenomena. These nomenclatures are heard more when there is a discourse on translation and when formal courses are there on translation. In reality, a phenomenon is identified first, and then comes its nomenclature. The nomenclature is needed to record things, to communicate others about the knowledge of a concept or subject. It is essential when we have a recordable written education system. Likewise, translation has been happening since time immemorial, but its nomenclature is visible more in 20th and 21st century.

There was no print media to supply more number of copies of such mythological texts to all. In villages, you would get these texts in some houses where the house members are interested to read in their free time. My grandpa was a voracious reader. He was not only reading, he was encouraging others to read the mythological texts. He himself was supplying the texts to those who wanted to read or wanted to know more. These activities were revolved around Odia translations of the Sanskrit epics, there was an



interpreter, and there were listeners who were taking part in the discourse. This translation discourse is not a passive one; it is a translation-interpretation in action. They were reading, interpreting, arguing and implementing the moral principles stated in these texts in their lives. This is why the morals were like Arnold's touchstone. My grandpa was transcribing many translated proverbial lines on the walls of his shop.

It is not that the activities were revolving around texts in translation; they were also around original writing like Gangadhar's (one of the great Odia poets from Western Odisha) writings (Indumati, Tapaswini, Pranayabaalari etc). Gangadhar, a genius, who wrote these master pieces with highly Sanskritized vocabulary. Most of the elites in Western Odisha have mugged up many of his proverbial poetic lines like that of Bhagabata or Srimad Bhagabat Gita.

Translation is a part of my culture, I have recognized it. It is one of the embedded features of my cultural life. Listening to the recitation of Odia Mahabharata, Odia Bhagabat contributed to the moral and sociocultural growth of my life. I did not know that these were translations or transcreations from Sanskrit. But now, I can say confidently that these were translation activities.

Some of the quotations from these early translations have been like Arnold's touchstone. In our day-to-day activities, it has a big impact socio-culturally and morally.

Examples:

1. *Praanira bhalamanda vani, marana kale taahaa jaani*

Whether someone is good or bad, at the time of death only, one will know.

2. *Dukhe Sanchita Jete dhana, se nuhen sukhe prayojana*

Whatever wealth you gain by hard labor and with tears, it is not needed for your happiness.

3. *Martya mandale deha bahi, debataa hele heyn marai*

Whoever comes to this world has to die, whether man or god.

4. *Aahaare Bhalamanda Naahin, je sthaane jemanta milai*

There is no good or bad for food, it depends on place.

5. *Jaahaaku rakhibe Ananta, Kikaripaare Balabanta*

Whomever God blesses, no one can defeat him or her.

6. *Aapanaa Haste Jihwaa Chhedi, Ke achhi taara Prativaadi*

If you kill yourself, who can stop you.

I could divide all these translational activities (as far as the written record goes) of western Odisha for the sake of our discussion, into three phases:

1. Palm-leaf period
2. Paper period
3. Television period

1. Palm-leaf period

Nothing much is known and recorded regarding this period. Most of the mythological texts were written on palm-leaves. It was an individual endeavor. There was no system to do copying. To have an access to knowledge by all was difficult. It was the person who had written on the palm leaf was reading it only and others were listening. Sometime, when the person is not there, the letters were not legible.



2. Paper period

It is because of the arrival of printing press in Odisha, the texts were started getting printed and published in book forms. Whatever was available in palm leaf started getting available in book forms. The access to knowledge was accelerated by the printing technology. Multiple copies of the same were available and people did not need to depend on one person's material only. It is in this period; translational activities were expended and facilitated. But the structure was still the same. There was no change in the cultural activities, these were only accelerated. We got Ramayana, Mahabharata and Bhagabat in book forms.

3. Television period

Television became a reality in the twentieth century. This is a revolutionary development in communication. When TV was introduced in schools in 80s and 90s, people became attracted towards this new technology like anything. Gradually, Ramayana was serialized. People got to watch Ramayana visually. Visualizing all the episodes of Ramayana was bringing a reality for them. They had read Ramayana in books, they had listened to its stories but now it was visible in front of them. It brought a new interest in people for these translated epics.

There is no age in the literature of a language, where there is no translation. History of literature in a particular language cannot sideline the contribution of translation from a source or sources in various forms. Histories of literature in the major languages of the world have been filled with the translation of many classical texts. Classical texts differ from a language to another. Odyssey, Iliad etc are the classical texts for English and other European languages. Mahabharat, Ramayana etc are the classical texts for Indian languages. Such classical texts are available in

Indian languages in many forms. Broadly, one of them is translation. The word translation or Anubaada (in Odia) might not be there, but the acts of translation in the form of transcreation, or in the form of interpretation must be there.

A particular culture is understood by considering its various practices. These practices are reflected on its literature. This literature includes many mythological texts and also texts of other genre. Every culture has its own texts which have been playing pivotal role in shaping the culture that are known as the classical texts. These texts are not only available in written forms, but also in various oral forms. It is always difficult to write about the non-recorded subjects. In the history of the world, many texts were not recorded. In our text book of history, we read only the recorded subject matters. The task of situating a particular phenomenon in a particular time and space becomes easier, if it is from a number of recorded subject-matters or from a number of observable facts. The observable facts have guided me to situate various activities centered on the translated or transcreated texts. Reading or reciting is one of those observable facts which I witnessed as a part of a community or culture to which I belong. Reading mythological texts has been a part of Hindu culture. All these texts were translated or transcreated from Sanskrit to local languages. These texts were created by learned scholars of the local languages for the purpose of enlightening the people and enculturating them in a prescriptive way and also to disseminate knowledge. There was a reading public in every village who read these texts in an occasion or read in their free time in temple premises or in common places. Another aim of these activities was to create a religious atmosphere and to create a discourse on God and His activities. Mostly Brahmins were the people who were entrusted the work of reciting/



reading/interpreting these mythological texts. Still we could see these things happening in many villages of Odisha. Mostly, in earlier days, these texts were written in palm leaves, till the printing technology came to exist. Some of these texts are as follows: a) Ramayana-7 pieces, b) Mahabharat-18 pieces, c) Haribamsa, d) Bhagabata-12 pieces. Interestingly, these texts were more popular than their authors. In Western Odisha, people may not know who has authored Odia Mahabharat, or Ramayana but they know about Mahabharata and Ramayana, they read these texts. Classical texts were more important for the people than their authors. It is only towards the end of 20th century, we are worried about the copyrights and authorship and translator. When my grandpa was holding the translation and reading it and others were listening to his interpretation and taking part in the discourse, there was no thought on the translator who had translated the text, there was no definite notion of source text and target text, there was no issue on the translation at all, but here and there they were referring to the author and this was also minimal.

All these texts are either translation or transcreation from the Sanskrit original. Out of the four, a, b, and d are mostly read book. The language of these texts is archaic or standard form, and these are loaded with highly Sanskritized words. These texts are in poetic form and there has been an epic style used in these texts. Another function of these texts and activities was to standardize Odia language. But this function is an indirect one. The language of these texts all over Odisha is same. It is a research question whether there has been any dialectical influence on the language of these texts.

And also there was no choice, no alternative. One of the features of modernity and

urbanization is it has given us choices. With choices, it has given us accessibility. We could see the development of various forms of translation and interpreting activities from orality to television. These earlier texts were for the matured adults, though children took part in it. There was no form available for children. Now we can have various forms of these texts meant for various audiences. There is a cartoon Ramayana for children in TV channels these days.

These days, new forms of Ramayana serial and Mahabharata are coming up in TV channels. Now, there is a cartoon Ramayana for children. People became more interested in TV, not in books. Advent of TV had decreased the number of reading public on these epics. Now the question is, does this TV culture bring out the moral changes in people? There is no discussion followed by. These epics have become mere stories only. Making a cartoon of Ram has made people believe that Ram also can have fluctuating forms.

My Grandpa is not there now, but he is always there when I think about translation of mythological texts and their implications on socio-cultural growth of my village. Reading translated texts is more popular than translating a text. Nobody knew that what they were reading was a translation from a Sanskrit text. Reading is one of the agents of popularizing translated texts. Reading, understanding and interpreting the translated texts were happening simultaneously. There is no exhaustive socio-cultural history of Western Odisha. Goals of these translational activities were A. To Standardize Odia, B. To prescribe morals for people, C. To create discourse, arguments, D. To integrate society.