Ars Artium: **An International Peer Reviewed-cum-Refereed Research Journal of English Studies and Culture**
ISSN (Online) : 2395-2423 • ISSN (Print) : 2319-7889
Vol. 7, January 2019
Pp. 94-100
http://www.arsartium.org

Translation in Postcolonial Odisha: A Study Through Translated Works of Some Nobel Laureates

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Abstract

Translation Studies, that gradually consolidated its position in the world literary stage as a major academic discipline is today acknowledged and seen as a strong medium of connecting people and boosting cross-cultural relations defying time and space. However, translation is not merely a linguistic effort on the part of a translator, it is rather a study through the socio-cultural, political, historical conditions associated with the target audience of the text. It acts as a bridge between two cultures, introducing one to the other transcending language barriers. Therefore, when a text is translated, it is recontextualised, rewritten and transformed aiming at influencing the readers and seeking to change the existing conditions. This paper will examine the reception of World Literature in the state of Odisha (in India) during the postcolonial era with a focus on the popular works of some of the Nobel Prize winners that got translated into Odia. These works were published at a time when the world political scene was witnessing a major political movement in the form of Cold War after the Second World War that led to the formation of the Eastern Bloc and the Western Bloc. It is to be examined if and how the translators and their writings were influenced by this development. Although, India had freed itself from the British rule, the translated works of Nobel Laureates may be seen as part of an attempt to move away from British literature and introduce the natives of Odisha to other literatures of the West. Also, Odisha, as a state was undergoing major changes socially, culturally and politically around the same time. This paper will explore the manner in which these themes are embedded in the translated works, analyze the ideas endorsed in the writings and the impact it strived to have on the people of Odisha.

Keywords: Postcolonial Translation, Cold War, Odisha, Odia, Nobel Laureates.

Translation Studies that emerged as a major field of study in the middle of the twentieth century is not only an effort on the part of a translator to transcend

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linguistic barriers but also to introduce one culture to another and act as a medium enabling cross-cultural communication. A translator takes into account the prevailing socio-cultural, historical, political, religious aspects associated with the target audience of the text being translated. Generally, a translator decides to choose such texts which have similarities with one's culture or that which in one's opinion has the strength to influence the existing conditions and lead to the cultural development of the place. Here, the interest of the readers is also of primary importance and a translator strives to produce a text that appeals to them. Therefore, an original work is recontexualised and transformed in the process of getting translated into different languages. As a result, a text goes beyond the boundaries of the nation where it was created to be presented and received in other nationalities. This paper will discuss the reception of World Literature in Odisha with reference to the works of Nobel Laureates that were translated into Odia in the Postcolonial era.

> Translation in Odisha dates back to the 15th century with the translation of the epic, The *Mahabharata* by Sarala Das from Sanskrit into Odia. He also translated other monumental works like the *Chandi Purana,* an epic poem of 5500 verses. At the time, Sarala Das translated the epic, the lower caste people were not allowed to learn Sanskrit and read the scriptures. However, he defied the societal norms laid down by the elite class and translated it into Odia enabling the natives to read them irrespective of their castes. (Pattanaik 73)

These translations freed the original writings from the clutches of the elites and made these holy texts accessible to the Odia people.

> It was followed by Jagannath Dash's translation of *The Bhagabata* in the 16th century and the efforts of Mukul Das in the 17th century and Fakir Mohan Senapati, Radhanath Ray, Madhusudan Rao, etc. in the 19th century immensely contributed to the growth of Translation Studies as a genre in Odia literature. These writers of the 19th century made tremendous efforts to preserve the identity of Odia as a separate language. Fakir Mohan Senapati also got involved in translating the works of Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar from Bengali into Odia. The 20th century witnessed the translation of major works in English literature like Walter Scott's *The Lady of the Last Minstrel*, Tennyson's *The Princess, Enoch Arden*, etc. These are a few works to name. Apart from these, the plays of Shakespeare like the *Hamlet* and the *Othello* have also been translated by Akshaya Kumar Chakravati and Mayadhar Mansingh respectively and Russian classics like Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* was presented to the Odia readers in translated form by Gopinath Mohanty and Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and Gorky's *The Mother* have also been translated into Odia. Apart from these works, *Tales from Shakespeare* by Charles and Mary Lamb has been translated and abridged Odia versions of major works of British and American Literature have also been published like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, among other works (Kar 599-600).

World Literature and translation are inter linked as translation enables texts to reach the readers across geographical and linguistic borders. Hence, it is rightly stated that, "Translation enables the international reception of literary texts" (Venuti 180).

Generally, texts from different regions of the world are translated into local or standard dialect for easy understanding of the text by the natives. It can be said that World Literature combines foreign and local elements in a text and boosts cross-cultural relations and promotes cultural diversity. Therefore, it becomes vital for the translator to work in sync with the prevailing culture and beliefs of the place of the target readers. Translation enables texts not only to cross national boundaries but also helps in making a mark in the global platform for the local or regional language. Therefore, Translation Studies invariably involves for the translator a study of the conventions, norms and practices of the society prevalent during the time a translated work is produced. This paper takes into account the translated works of Nobel Prize winners because at the time, they acted as instruments in presenting World Literature to the people of Odisha and will also examine the probable reasons behind these works getting translated. These texts include *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway, *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse, *The Pilgrim Kamanita* by Karl Gjellerrup, and *Strait is the Gate* by André Gide. *The Old Man and the Sea*, was written by Ernest Hemingway in 1952 for which he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1953 followed by the Nobel Prize in 1954. It was translated by Subhadranandan into Odia titled *Aparajita* and published in 1955 with the latest edition being published in 2016. The German writer and winner of the Nobel Prize in 1946, Hermann Hesse wrote one of his most appreciated works, *Siddhartha*, later translated into English by Hilda Rosner and into Odia by Subhadranandan in the year 1954. *The Pilgrim Kamanita*, by Danish writer, Karl Gjellerup was published in 1906 and translated into English in 1912 by John E. Logie. This book was presented to the Odia readers titled, *Yatree Kamanita* by Chittaranjan Das; it was first translated into Odia from Danish. Gjellerup was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1912. The *Strait is the Gate* was written in 1909 in French by André Gide who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1947. This French novel was translated into English by Dorothy Bussy, and Subhadranandan translated it into Odia in 1957 titled *Priyatama*. He was earlier introduced to the Indian readers as the translator of Rabindranath Tagore's Nobel award winning, *Gitanjali* into French. These texts set the stage for the reception and acceptance of World Literature to the people of Odisha. There are varied factors that affect the creation of a translated text and one of these among other factors is also the political condition that prevails at the time of its production. Translation and politics are closely related. Although, it is vividly not known, yet translation is influenced by politics and is also used for political motives. It is influenced by the political conditions of the time. Although, the above mentioned texts were published in the Postcolonial era, however, they were deeply affected and influenced by the colonial rule in Odisha and also by the world political scenario.

The world politics was witness to a crucial political movement in the form of Cold war which began after the end of the Second World War in 1945 between the Soviet Union and the United States. This led to the formation of the Eastern and the Western Blocs with the USSR exercising its power over the states of the Eastern Bloc and the United States challenging the Soviet power by extending help to the Western European countries that resulted in the creation of The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance. It is to be seen whether these translated writings were used by the translators to express solidarity with one of the warring blocs or create a

space that was affected by neither and at the same time appropriate for the growth of Odia literature and language. It could also be seen as an effort on the part of the translators to distance themselves from the Union's political ideologies and maintain their neutrality. It is because while we were close to the Soviet Union and shared good diplomatic, military relations with it, we also had a democratic form of government which we share with the US. It is to be noted that the Soviet Union also engaged in getting Russian literature into Indian languages in a big way around this time. Hence, translation enables the global reception and distribution of the prize to a great extent. Since Nobel Prize awardees belong to different nationalities and write in their native language, therefore, translation plays a pivotal role while choosing the winners of this prestigious prize. In the chapter titled, "A. K. Ramanujan's Theory and Practice of Translation" in *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, Dharwadker mentions that, "As Ramanujan says in the Translator's Note to *Samskara*, 'A translator hopes not only *to translate a text, but hopes (against all odds) to translate a non-native reader into a native one*. The Notes and After word [in this book] are part of that effort" (Dharwadker 121-22). Hence, it can be rightly said that translation reduces the gap between a native and a non-native reader. Translation and the translated texts of these famous authors and awardees of the prestigious Nobel Prize certainly helped in introducing the other literatures of the West to the natives of Odisha. At the time, many Russian Classics were also presented to the Odia readers. These authors hailed from different parts of the world like Denmark, Germany, the USA, France, etc. and most of these works were translated from their native languages into English and then into Odia. In this manner, these translated texts enabled deep cross-cultural communication that translation inevitably made possible. Another factor that needs attention is that these texts were published after India gained its independence from the British rule, therefore, it also gave creative freedom to the translators to push their literary boundaries and explore varied topics, new ideas and areas.

During the colonial rule, translation was dominated by the rules and conventions set by the colonizers for translating texts usually meant for European readers. It has been clearly stated in the Introduction to the *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice* by the editors of the book that,

> The close relationship between colonization and translation has come under scrutiny; we can now perceive the extent to which translation was for centuries a one-way process with texts being translated *into* European languages for European consumption, rather than as part of a reciprocal process of exchange. European norms have dominated literary production, and those norms have ensured that only certain kinds of text, those that will not prove alien to the receiving culture, come to be translated (Bassnett and Trivedi 5).

Hence it can be rightly said that, translation did not allow smooth cross-cultural communication between the rulers and the ruled. They also used literature to their benefits, as a medium to affect and mould the minds of the people in their favour. While the rulers used the literary texts and translation for the propagation of different religions and missionary activities, at the same time it was used as a medium to unite

the people in the struggle for formation of Odisha as a separate state and the growth of the Odia literary canon. Translation was an essential medium in fulfilling the aims of both the colonizers and the colonized. Although, India had attained its freedom yet, the cultural and religious impact continued to affect the natives. Issues like the prevalence and propagation of different religions, missionary activities, the formation of the State on a linguistic basis and the persistent efforts made thereafter for the growth of Odia language and literature were not only prevalent but also contributed immensely to the translation of these texts. For instance, in *Siddhartha*, the journey of Siddhartha towards self-discovery has traces of both Buddhism and Hinduism. Hesse's writing is preoccupied with Indian ideas and philosophy and it can be understood that his reading of the scriptures like the translations of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the Upanishads widely influenced him and his writing. Therefore, the title of the text *Siddhartha: An Indian Tale* confirms that this text is indeed influenced by the culture of India. In the text, Siddhartha, the son of a Hindu priest lives a normal life led by the Brahmins, learning and imbibing the teachings of Brahmanism. Eventually he leaves home in the search of a new path with his friend, Govinda and joins the *Samanas*, "wandering ascetics". Meanwhile, Govinda decides to join the Buddha while Siddhartha refuses to do so. After leaving the Buddha, he leaves the town and leads a normal life and sometime later, greatly frustrated and disturbed with his present life contemplates suicide. The story is filled with the ideas of Hinduism and elements of Buddhism as well. From the characters being Brahmins to the mention of the Vedas, to Siddhartha hearing the holy word "OM" that stops him from committing suicide and which marks the beginning of a new life for him, the book is replete with principles and beliefs of Hinduism. The author, Hesse rightly says in *Siddhartha*, "And in the moment when the sound of 'Om' touched Siddhartha's ear, his dormant spirit suddenly woke up and realized the foolishness of his actions" (97). The sound of 'Om' becomes a very important part of the text from here on and is repeated later in the text as well to guide him in the right path through the journey of life. Therefore, it can be said that the text was an attempt to influence and make an impact on the readers on religious terms as the readers were familiar with the tenets of both the religions. Similarly, *The Pilgrim Kamanita*, by Karl Gjellerup is a story set in India about two wandering monks, Kamanita and Vasitthi who meet at Kosambi and fall in love only to be separated later with their lives moving in different directions from there on witnessing a lot of difficulties and hard times. The text has references to the Gautama Buddha and Buddhist ideologies in plenty although at the time India was under the influence of Brahmanism, with the pilgrim Kamanita meeting the Buddha just before his death only to be made realized later. Both the novels, *Siddhartha* and *The Pilgrim Kamanita* contain elements of Indian philosophy, beliefs and teachings of Buddhism. *The Old Man and the Sea*, by Ernest Hemingway revolves around Santiago, the protagonist, and his eighty-four day long and arduous journey and his failure in the sea. On the eighty-fifth day, he leaves for a three-day odyssey into the sea. This time he catches a marlin which is later attacked by a shark and he returns deeply disheartened with the skeleton of the marlin. In the text, the old man remembers Jesus Christ in a number of occasions. The wounds that Santiago got while fishing in the sea remind the readers about Jesus Christ's wounds and sufferings. In the end, "Devastated by the turn of

the events, he lies down in his room resting on the newspapers with his arms straight out and palms up" (Subhadranandan 81) and his posture is similar to that of Jesus Christ while being crucified. This text is filled with Biblical allusions and themes of Christianity and the availability of the translated text Aparajita further helps in making the text available to the Odia readers easily as well as in the better understanding of the themes discussed in the text. Also, due to the Missionary activities undertaken for the spread of Christianity, the natives were well-versed with the beliefs and the teachings of Christianity that would make them relate to the themes discussed leading to better reception of the text. However, the process of spreading and propagating Christianity began much earlier with the translation of the *Bible* into Odia which was a part of the missionary activities undertaken for religious conversion. The translation of *The New Testament* and John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim Progress* were also efforts made in this direction. Besides, *Strait is the Gate*, by André Gide is a story of unrequited love between two cousins, Jerome and Alissa. This text has many references to Christianity beginning with the title itself which appears at the end of the first chapter as the subject of a sermon on the Sunday. Hence, Gide states in the *Strait is the Gate*, "Pasteur Vautier, no doubt intentionally, had chosen his text Christ's words: 'Strive to enter in at the strait gate'" (20). Festivals like Easter and Christmas have been mentioned and there is an elaborate discussion on the celebration of Christmas in the book. Since, the people of Odisha were aware about the principles of Buddhism as well as the tenets of Christianity because of the missionary activities, therefore, it can be said that one of the reasons for translating these texts could be the natives' familiarity with the subject which would help the people to relate to it and their acceptance of these works would contribute immensely in the growth of Odia literature. Apart from these socio-cultural factors, the political atmosphere of Odisha at the time was not stable. It was struggling to free itself from the dominion of the Bengali language and the discrimination it faced at the hands of the English and create a separate state for Odisha. Eventually, Odisha was formed on 1st April, 1936 and became the first state to be formed on a linguistic basis. Thereafter, it was essential to aware people about their language and literature and the newly emerging literary genres. Also, during Odisha's struggle for the formation of a separate state, a number of texts by leading authors of the time were produced to consolidate the power of Odia as a separate language and propagate the growth of Odia literature. Further, the translated texts of the widely read literary works of highly acknowledged authors of different origins having great literary value in the realm of World Literature contributed immensely to the growth of Odia language and literature as well. It helped Odia in entering and making a mark in the global literary scene and enriched Odia literary canon.

The prestigious and globally acknowledged Nobel Prize in the field of literature is awarded to littérateurs from across the world with no distinction being made on the basis of their geographical location, language or nationality. Therefore, translation of their works could be seen as an attempt to overcome the limitations imposed by identity politics by giving emphasis on linguistic identity. The translation of the above discussed texts and their reception show the people of Odisha striving to rise above

identity politics based on religion, caste, etc. and with this contributing to the growth of Odia language, culture and literature.

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