

Voices for the Unheard and the Unsung: Translation, English and Indianans

In a multi-lingual country like India, English has an important role to play. It can function as a link language among regional languages of India. In this context, the role of literary translations from Indian literatures into English may become fruitful both academically and culturally. Besides, translations from Indian literatures into English emerge as an effective strategy of weaving the nation together, of providing insights into literatures of India.

But unfortunately Indian Universities seem to fail in providing a decolonized model of English education. The results of Macaulay's educational frame-work are around us. Today, we often find "a class of persons, Indians in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect".¹ It is less surprising and more shocking that Oxford University allowed English as a subject in 1894, but the British rulers started English education in India in 1857. That English literature was introduced as a subject in India to cut Indians off their tradition seems to be forgotten. If we make a comparative study of curriculum in Pre-Independence India and Post-Independence India, we would hardly find changes. The government curriculum during the British rule in India included poetical selections from Goldsmith, Gray, Addison and Shakespeare, Milton's 'Paradise Lost', Addison's 'Essays' and Dr. Johnson's 'Lives of the Poets'. But even today, many irrelevant English texts are prescribed in Indian Universities by 'designers' of English curriculum. Still, at Under-graduate and Post-graduate levels, Spenser, Marlowe, Dryden and Pope enjoy their place in Indian Universities. While these English poets are still praised, many great Indian poets in regional literatures go unheard. Still, Aristotle and Longinus are worshipped as the angels who brought the light of criticism on the earth. It is an irony that many Indian scholars in English who eulogize Derrida and Foucault feel inward emptiness for not knowing Bharata, Mammata and Panini. Such Indian scholars in English who vehemently discuss Post-Structuralism and Post-Modernism experience their lack of knowledge in Rasa Theory of Indian Drama, Non-Absolutism of Jainism.

Isn't it an irony that English teachers in India have taught Wordsworth's 'Daffodils' without having any idea of their shape, color, size and smell? Isn't it an irony that Eliot's 'The Waste Land' has often been taught on the fertile land of India without properly understanding the cultural implications and the Christian overtones in the text? English teachers in India have labeled Shakespeare as 'the greatest poet in the world' at the cost of Kalidas and Ghalib. Often English teachers in India clap for the foreign Nobel Prize Winners leaving their own poets unheard and unsung. In Indian Universities, at Under-Graduate and Post-Graduate levels, only one paper of 'Indian Writing in English' is introduced and too often even that paper is optional.

This continuation of the colonial past has brought a paradigm of conflict between 'material' and 'learners'. Material is foreign, while learners are Indians. Therefore, communication which is an important part of class-room teaching fails. English teachers then sadly conclude in Refresher Courses and seminars that English literature is rootless in our country. Prof. R.P.Bhatnagar's remark is very apt here:

Let me state straight that I believe that English literature should not be taught in the name of English and that by and large English literature cannot be taught here. Because the pre-conditions for learning English literature do not exist—knowledge of the Bible, a high proficiency in English language, knowledge of Greek mythology and of course knowledge of European history.²

Today, those who are in Board of Studies in Indian Universities must address these issues:

- What is Indian education?
- Where is the Indianness of Indian Universities?
- What is the place of Kalidas, Meghani, Ghalib and Bankimbabu in Departments of English in India?
- Are we not over-enthusiastic in appreciating western poets and in welcoming western critical theories?

The role of English translation of Indian literatures becomes significant in reinforcing Indianness in educational programmes of Indian universities. If translated Indian

literatures are prescribed in the curriculum of Indian universities, then there are obvious advantages that would come to the front:

- (1) Translation is connected with human communication. The paradigm of conflict between material and learner or between the eastern and the western culture would disappear, if Indian universities are introduced for Graduate and Post-Graduate levels in English.
- (2) In a pluralistic society like India, English translations from Indian literatures would lessen conflicts of caste, class and religion and would establish harmony. English then can be a powerful medium of intra-cultural exchange.
- (3) Indian students would get an exposure to Indian poets, Indian Poetics and Indian literatures through English translations. They would get a chance to closely study literary and cultural tradition of India.
- (4) The four skills of language-learning would effortlessly develop, if Indian students study Indian literatures through English translations. It would help them in improving their linguistic competence.
- (5) Patriotism which has either become a mere philosophy or a political slogan would be realized in its truest sense, if Indian students are given opportunities of studying literary and cultural greatness of India.
- (6) The field of comparative literature would develop through English translations of Indian literatures. Between Kannada and Gujarati classics or between Bengali and Punjabi classics, a comparative study would create more interest among students, if instead of 'English literature', 'Indian literatures translated into English' are taught.

Translations thus help in resolving conflicts of learner and culture and in solving some of the major problems pertaining to syllabi and class-room communication.