



# TRANSCENDING LINGUISTIC FRONTIER : THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TRANSLATION IN U.R.ANANTHA MURTHY'S *SAMSKARA*

Preeti priyadarsini

## ABSTRACT :

The current paper deals with the myriad facets of challenges encountered by a translator not only within a multilingual country like India but also in transgressing national boundaries to present the native essence of a text to the global audience. The major problem that apparently overwhelms a translator in the voyage of translation is the creation of an ambiguity. This lack of clarity is the aftermath of a search for the best-suited and precise or apt vocabulary that sustains the cultural flavour and uniqueness in which the text is born. The very title of the novel in discussion 'Samskara' hosts an array of meanings in Indian philosophy. To imbibe or inculcate the most suitable concept from the gamut provided by the original text is a matter of discernment. Language is embedded deep in the collective consciousness of a people held together by numerous binding factors like culture, region, history or other common criteria distinguishing them from another particular group. A certain language is entrenched or entangled in the collective psyche of a people to an extent that in the literature of that region animals too tend to speak in the same language. This present paper tends to effectively deal with the different dynamics that come into the picture as soon as the journey of translation begins. U.R.Anantha Murthy's 'Samskara' has been rendered to be his magnum opus. Authored in 1965 and largely remaining confined in its consumption, it was translated to English by A.K.Ramanujan in 1976 which gained global readership for the novel.

**Key words :** challenge, translation, *Samskara*, language, culture

A.K.Ramanujan writes, "A translator hopes not only to translate a text, but hopes to translate a non-native reader into a native one." A translation strives not to merely convert a text into English but to retain to the utmost of its ability, the native essence. This native essence can be likened to the term *sthalapurana* used by Raja Rao in Kanthapura. The translated text is perceived by the Western reader and a native reader in drastically different manner. The translator takes up the daunting task of making a non-native reader grasp the unique cultural flavour of the original text. In order to lucidly elaborate this point, a very general and common example can be cited. In several Indian languages like Odia or Hindi, the pronouns to address people of different age groups or in relation to the person being addressed. The pronouns referred to are : '*Apana/Aap*', '*Tume/Tum*' and '*Tu*'. But in English the only pronoun for all the aforementioned pronouns in native languages is 'you'. In consequence, this greatly narrows down the scope of translating the native aura and effectively conveying the deeper aspects of the emotions weaved along with the word. The opportunity or ability to precisely communicate the inherent cultural ethos to the Western world is burdened on the adjectives like Respected, Dear, etc. Thus, so much of the nuances is lost in translation.

The opening sentence of this paper can be further analysed. The quote by A. K.Ramanujan brings one to contemplate upon the ideas of native and non-native. These hold greater significance in a multi diverse country like India which is the home to an array of languages. The two families of languages from which most Indian languages are derived are Aryan and Dravidian. Among Dravidian languages Kannada and Telugu share greater commonality as do Malayalam and Tamil. So a native Kannada reader and a non-native Telugu reader find more layers of meaning in a Kannada text than a non-native Odia reader or any other reader who speaks an Aryan language as one's first language. But when we transgress national borders it is another layer of a story. What I want to emphasize here is that the onus of garnering the several strands of meaning is left on the reader. One needs to garner as much of meaning as possible after unfurling one fold after another in a translated text.

The title *Samskara* so aptly chosen by U.R.Anantha Murthy for his novel provides a range of meanings in Indian philosophy. In one context, samskaras are the diverse rites of passage of a human being from conception to cremation, signifying the multiple milestones in an individual's journey of life in Hinduism. Annaprashana samskara is the celebrating of a baby's first taste of solid food. However, Anantha Murthy's text titled *Samskara* in Kannada while being titled and subtitled as *Samskara, A rite for a dead man* by A.K.Ramanujan. The translated text highlights the theme of funeral rites or obsequies as evident in the context of the novel. An analysis of the title transcending the medium of portrayal of the text from text to movie is interesting. The Kannada movie is titled eponymously as *Samskara* with its English title being *Funeral Rites*, completely doing away with a subtitle. The English text version has been titled and translated by a native while the English movie title is the coinage of a non-native. The title can refer to rituals, transformation, purification, consecration, identity, moral dilemmas and the clash of tradition with modernity. The novel carries forth most of the aforementioned themes though funeral rites the most obvious one forms the prime motif of the story in

picture. The title comprising a single word is a multifaceted terminology that encapsulates the prime motifs and internal debates interspersed throughout the text. It is a mammoth task to gather the same concept from an array of meanings by a non-native reader as a native reader. Rather it is an upheaving endeavour on the part of a translator to convey as much of the strata or the implied suggestions of a native term to a non-native reader as possible. The unfurling of the native nomenclature in the subconscious of the native mind is going to vary considerably from the non-native consciousness, both in the extent and quality of comprehensiveness. If so much of the title has lost its significance in the translated text, it is a matter to ponder upon the degree of loss carried forward through the translation of the text in the subsequent pages of the book and through the English subtitles in the movie for the Western reader.

At its core, 'samskara' refers to ritual or sacrament performed in Hinduism. These rituals are considered pivotal in the life of an individual, marking significant transitions and events, such as birth, marriage, and death and **not only death**. The story in the novel is obviously weaved around Naranappa's death and the impending funeral rites performed at length but the story is as much about transformation as it is about obsequies. The transformation of the character of Praneshacharya constitutes a very evident part in the title. The translated title *Funeral rites* (movie version) or the subtitle *A rite for a dead man* does not do justice to the Kannada title *Samskara*. The novel at the same time beckons the individual reader for self-transformation. U.R. Anantha Murthy acts as a social reformer of the contemporary times giving out a clarion call to do away with rigid, meaningless, orthodoxy. The original text is more inclusive assimilating the reader into the realms of the characters and gathering the reader into its folds. However, this sense is eluded in the translated text. The extent of loss of connotative references is a matter of utter discernment and remains to be comprehended. The transformation can be sought at personal or societal level. The intricacies invoke the tension between adherence to traditional customs and the pressured of adapting to a changing world.

Delving further into the text, various similar Sanskrit words come into the picture. It is difficult to provide connotative meaning to words in the original text. Some English words fail to give the connotative Sanskrit meaning like *Panchamrit* (five fold nectar), *aposhana* (consecrated water), *saligram* (holy stone), *ekadashi* (eleventh day of the month), *mangalsutra* (wedding string), *mangalarati* (flaming camphor), a conventional widowhood, etc. This problem of exactitude recurs while translating mantras. The colloquialism emphasises to a great extent the relevance of the language being intricately tied to the cultural milieu of the region. This vastly enshrouds the context of a text while it is being rendered into a translation to enable the non-native reader to consume the regional flavour. Colloquial language refers to words and expressions that belong to conversational speech and not to standardised or formal speech. These countless colloquial phrases scattered in the dialogues between the different characters throughout the text are deeply rooted in the culture of the place. The translator at best can make an effort towards approximation due to lack of equivalents in the target language. When some of the colloquial words and expressions are given literal translation, it may result in misrepresentation. The word *Agrahara* is roughly translated to a Brahmin ghetto. But how much of the

Brahmin orthodoxy or the difference between Brahmadeya and Agrahara is garnered by the non-native reader is left to question.

A.K.Ramanujan relies on additional notes and afterword in the translated version along with the converted original text into English in order to effectively convey the regional ethos that impact the creative process. Language provides a framework for an individual's thoughts. Continuity of language comprising special intonation, dialect, pronunciation contributes to the formation of a shared unifying force or a collective consciousness. Herbert Read vociferously states the strong relationship between writer and his region. A similar standpoint can be drawn regarding a writer and his language. An 'invisible matrix' denominated by Read is the outcome of not only the locale but also speech. This matrix moulds the minds of the people residing in the locale and sharing common language. If locale forms the nature component, language undoubtedly manifests itself as the culture component in the binary both of which are inescapable for an author.

However, it is to be noted that the novel *Samskara* remained largely limited in its readership and in real sense the powerful journey of *Samskara* began in its rendered form. The term 'translation' is derived from the Latin 'translatio'. It is a combination of two sub words 'trans' signifying across and 'latus' meaning bearing or carrying. The word, therefore, means bearing meaning crossing borders of linguistic barriers. The various terms denominated for translation in the Indian languages do not portray similar meaning. Numerous words like *Anuvad* (speak after), *bhashantar* (linguistic transference), *tarzuma* (reproduction), *roopantar* (change of form), *vivartanam* (change), *mozhimattam* (change of script) - do not convey the meaning as the word translation. They, in fact, depict a process deemed by P.Lal, one of India's most renowned translators, as the procedure of 'transcreation'. This is a method employed by most translators in a multilingual country like India. The rendered work is not a mere meek transference of meaning from one linguistic system to the other. It is a retelling of the text by the translator in another language.

The heart of the novel comprises the death of heretic Naranappa, who died without any children to perform his obsequies. Thus, the problem here is Naranappa being not only childless but also pleasure-seeking and sensual. The question remains unanswered in the Agrahara. The search for a solution to this query befalls the self-disciplined leader Praneshacharya. This dilemma demands quick thinking and resolving. Praneshacharya seeks for solution in the Vedas but fails. Chandri, a character much lower in status but apparently more practical than Praneshacharya takes charge and cremates the rotting body with the help of Muslim. The Western reader is bound to garner the story and even the practice of caste system and its evils that perpetuated throughout history from the translation. But how much of the cultural anthropology, subtle humour, mythology, architecture, literature, food habits, dressing style, and music is conveyed to the non-native reader is left best to the ability of the translator and calls for debate.

Humour is a primary ingredient of the language of a region. Sarcasm, irony, tautology and innuendos compose the richness of a language and this is one of the major reasons of loss of meaning in translation. A sombre aura pervades throughout the text. Simultaneously, the witty exchange of dialogues between Praneshacharya and Narayanappa about mythical characters uplifts the serious atmosphere and questions the taboos of the higher caste, self-proclaimed rational beings.

Multilingualism is the need of the hour as diversity helps create and sustain an identity for a group of people. This identity provides a sense of belongingness as the immediate consequence. In the long run this belongingness secures humaneness and preserves humanity. Thus, a language perpetuates a certain culture, a specific history by being passed through the collective subconscious or collective memory across generations. Milan Kundera very notably highlights the significance of language when he states, “The first step in liquidating a people is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history.” Books presuppose a language not only in its oral form but requiring a script or a written form of the language which was a necessity to keep records in the earlier times. Therefore, books need to be written in the local language. Simultaneously, the texts require translation into English to cater to the global audience. Language hierarchy comes to play with this context. The non-native readers should realise the richness of native ethos while coming across such translations and this can dispel their notion of self-proclaimed superiority. Translation acts as a common platform for the native and non-native mind. It latently manifests itself as the meeting ground for ideas transcending linguistic margins. Similarly, *Samskara* coherently adheres diverse lingual groups - the Kannada populace with the non-Kannada populace. Had *Samskara* not been rendered into English, most of the non-Kannada speaking people in India too would not have experienced the vibrant text.

The death of a renegade brahmin poses an insuperable problem to a community whose fear of spiritual pollution blinds them to the advent of the plague. An analysis of the cultural hurdles countered in the course of translation highlights that the chief vagueness prevails in language. The indomitable character Praneshacharya is proficient in Vedic studies. His communication is heavy with sanskritised words. The native reader feels his towering personality and his virtuous behaviour through the medium of his pious words. This, however, is unable to convince or satiate the expectation of a non-native reader as the language used in translation for all the characters is the same irrespective of whether the character in question is Naranappa, a sharp tongued outcaste Brahmin or low born prostitute Chandri. The nuances or inflections prevalent in the original Kannada text is not effectively communicated in the translate version even though A.K.Ramanujan has invented an ingenious solution by adding *notes* and *foreword*. The idiolect of Praneshacharya is difficult to be produced in precise or exact English. The rich vocabulary of the native novel provides a layer of meanings even for common words which is easily comprehended by the regional reader but extremely difficult to be grasped by the non-native ones.

*Samskara* tends to delve deep into myriad themes such as rites of passage, ritual preparation and transformation. The focus of the novel, in the course of time, shifts from issue of last rites of a dead man to the transformation that dawns upon Praneshacharya. He aimlessly wanders through the forest and is then accompanied by Putta to a fair. This is the place where Praneshacharya contemplates upon the his physical intimacy with Chandri which subsequently gnaws upon him. The author has deliberately chosen this gay festive environment to drive home the essence of the narrative to the reader. The strata of meaning shrouding the novel is something that needs to be garnered by the reader. The extent to which one gains one's understanding is decided by not only language but also the nativity of the reader.

However, despite all the difficulties that encumber the journey of translation, it cannot be denied that this transformation of a text has garnered for it a wider readership. More specifically and importantly translation into English has immensely benefited the text opening more debates and gaining more recognition for the original text and the author. This voyage of transcreation has been nothing less than a tremendous scope for gathering greater number of people for exchange of ideas even though, and there is not an iota of doubt about it, that the native essence of the original text is lost in the process. But it needs to be emphasized that had there been no translation neither would be cultural exchange possible nor would there be the opportunity to put in novelty of creativity at its stance. Translation has been a boon in all respect and helps establish the soft power of a nation. Overall it's a winwin in every aspect and the field needs to be perpetuated at any cost.

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