REVIEW ARTICLE

BARRIERS IN LITERARY TRANSLATION

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ABSTRACT

Indian literature is remarkably great. It has surpassed all barriers and found it's place in world literature in no time. When a regional dialect or national language has to cross its boundaries to attain world acclaim, it will definitely have to encounter many difficulties. Translation is considered as a linguistic as well as cultural activity, which deals not merely with the finding of lexical equivalents, but the proper communication of the meaning. A major barrier that is confronted by Indian literature, when presenting itself to the external world is the difference in culture. When translating the major works in Indian languages to foreign languages, the translator, almost always faces the difficulty of finding equivalent terms and phrases to replace the Indian words, which do not hinder in conveying the exact meaning to the readers. Since each word is an embodiment of ideas, feelings and emotions that the writer tries to convey to the readers, a change in the word by the translator may cause a complete change in the meaning that has to be conveyed. Vaikom Muhammmed Basheer, fondly remembered as Beypore Sultan, is one of the best fiction writers in Kerala. Enjoyable, both to the young and adults alike,his creativity in Malayalam language know no bounds. Almost all his works are autobiographical. His works have been translated into many world languages, and has achieved great acclaim. This paper tries to analyze the difficulties faced by R.E. Asher, the eminent linguist and translator, and his co-translator Achamma Coilparambil Chandrasekaran in translating Vaikom Muhammmed Basheer's work, *Me Grandad 'ad an Elephant! Three Stories of Muslim Life in South India*, published in 1944, especially in finding substitutes to a vernacular dialect like the Muslim Malayalam dialect.

Keywords : Translation, barriers, culture, substitutes

The history of translation dates back to the history of human civilization. It is in fact a part of our lives. The books we buy, the stories we read, the songs we listen, all may have been translated. These may have travelled from time to time and from place to place, crossing all cultural and linguistic boundaries, without us taking the least notice of the translations. The whole world has galloped with the wings of

translation. Today, translation has become the common interest of every individual. It has become a versatile means of communicating ideas to the whole world. Through translation, one can transfer knowledge, truth, ideas, culture, and so on.

Literary translation is the oldest type of translation. " The purpose of translation is primarily to carry the theme and the meta-theme of a source language text into a text written in another language, i.e target language"(Ray 41). Catford defines translation as " the replacement of textual materials in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language" (20). Translation is "rendering the meaning of a text into another language in a way that the author intends the text" (Newmark 5). It is "the expression in another language or (target language) of what has been expressed in another source language, preserving semantic and stylistic equivalences" (Bell 10). All these definitions clearly show that translation is not just the replacement of textual material in one language to another, but it is both a linguistic and cultural activity.

"No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached" (Bassnett 13). The difference in culture always poses a problem to the translator. Domestication in the translation field generally has a negative aura as it is suspected to be responsible for covering up the cultural traces of the original text. A great deal of research has been carried out in this field to check whether translated works have been domesticated or foreignized. The case is more evident when it comes to oriental and occidental cultures and translations of works in such languages. Stylistic faithfulness, flexibility, subjectivity in depicting the original message, the impossibility of finding the exact equivalents are some of the barriers that a translator has to face during the course of his work.

Vaikom Muhammmed Basheer's *Me Grandad 'ad an Elephant! Three Stories of Muslim Life in South India* is a very slim volume of 75 pages, published in 1944. It sold well in Malayalam and was translated into numerous languages in India and abroad, though it is not the finest of Basheer's works. Vaikom Muhammmed Basheer, fondly remembered as Beypore Sultan, is one of the best, vibrant and iconoclastic fiction writers in Kerala, India, noted for his path- breaking, down to earth style of writing that made him accomplish himself among the critics as a popular common man. Translations of his works into other languages won him worldwide acclaim.

Muslims in Kerala have created a vibrant sub- culture, which cannot be challenged by anyone. They have their own marvelous dialect and speech. The well- blended presence of Mappila dialect or 'Muslim Malayalam', as we can address it, a mixture of colloquial Malayalam embellished with Arabic words and phrases, makes it a language of its' own – a language within a language.

Capturing the nuances of this Muslim Malayalam dialect in English translation is a major endeavor and challenge for any translator. R.E. Asher, the eminent linguist and translator of Vaikom Muhammmed Basheer's works has written about the difficulty of translating the evanescent Muslim Malayalam dialect into a foreign dialect like English. When confronted with the "Islamic terminology that is no more familiar to the non- Muslim Malayali speaker of English," Asher says he had no option, but to sacrifice such dialectal variations completely because there was no English substitute for a vernacular dialect (xiv – xv). He considers Basheer as a literary figure who stands apart from his contemporaries. He also feels that the three novels presented in the book "are very difficult, having in common little more than the Kerala setting." He further clarifies that Basheer has made a conscious effort to produce an Islamic literature in Malayalam. Infact, every reader of Malayalam literature is well aware of the presence of Hindu, Christian and Muslim literature in Malayalam. Asher further says that Basheer's writing of Islamic literature does not mean that it does not hold attractive for non-Muslims. Achamma Coilparambil Chandrasekaran, about whom much is not known is the co-translator of the work.

The major difference between this novel among other novels of Basheer is that it is entirely autobiographical, as far as the characters and major incidents are concerned, intensifying the difficulty of the translators in producing a faithful translation of the work. The subjectivity of the writer comes in conflict with that of the translator when the element of autobiography comes. Recently acquired insights into the translation provide us new vantage points from which the readers can now have glimpses into some hitherto aspects of the present translation of Basheer's works. However, one has to concede that this translation stands

out as the most original, undiluted, objective, unbiased and balanced of all translations of modern Malayalam fiction into English hitherto looked into. Asher and Achamma do not suffer from the pains to explain the novelist to the West and paraphrase his works in the guise of translation. Neither did these translations attempt to make editions to make them presentable to the West.

Detailed notes have been offered within the "Introduction" regarding the unique way linguistic and cultured problems are handled in this work,

> ... There is little overlap in Malayalam between the set of kinship term used by Muslims and those by other communities. Part of the special flavour of Basheer's stories for a Malayali reader lies in his use of *bapa* as a term of address and reference for "father" and *umma* for "mother." It has seemed to us best to keep this in almost all cases. We have been rather sparing in the uses of *uppuppa* for "grandfather" and have used English equivalents for all other terms but one, and this only in one story. The reason for the exception is that one of the turns of the plot of 'Me Grandad 'ad an Elephant!' only make sense if Aisha is seen to be using the exclusively Muslim term *ikkakka* to refer to her "elder brother". (ix)

Analyzing the translation after so many years, one wishes that the translator, instead of finding formal equivalences or semantic potentials, had retained all such terms and forms of addresses as they were, it would have been more better for the reader. The non-translating strategy, i.e., retention of the original terms, is of course the most faithful strategy. An analysis of many translated novels turned out that this work is the one with the least number of problems, except in a couple of deletions during translation.

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