

**Modern Indian Writing and Translation**  
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**Week 1 Lecture 4: Introduction to Literature in Translation in India**

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Hello all welcome to yet another NPTEL session of modern Indian writing and translation. Today, I will be giving an introduction to translation. Translation bridges the gap between regional writings and it plays a pivotal role in the dissemination of texts across regions and boundaries. There are a lot of texts that are being translated from one language into another. But we can say that the translation of regional literatures into English is very extensive.

With the multiple translation of the original regional text into English, it becomes difficult to map out the translations and give prominence to one translated work over another, when we look at the, the short story ‘Hunger of Stones’, which was originally written in the Bengali under the title ‘Kshudhita Pashan’, it was initially translated into English by Charles Freer Andrews under the title The Hungry Stones.

So, you can understand that there are a lot of texts out there, which are translated from the regional text and you cannot actually pin down one translation as the original, you have a lot of translations on the single text and it becomes extremely difficult to give a sense of importance or superiority of one translation over the another. And it becomes very difficult to map out these translations as well.

A lot of Indian and Western translators are involved in, in bringing all these texts and approaches in this territory. In order to understand translation, it is important for us to understand the period of translation. We can roughly divide the translation into three periods, the first being the orientalism, the second is a period of Indian awakening, and the third is the post-independence period.

Orientalism is a imitation or depiction of aspects in the eastern world in art and literature. This period can be seen as a formative period in which the western people started to actually take keen interest on the orient. And they tried to learn more about them. A lot of oriental stereotypes were propagated through classical Greece and Roman writings. And through this,

these Western people have kind of formulated the idea of Orient and they, they try to understand the countries, these countries through these writings.

One of the other important factor or the aspect that helped in, in the development of this idea of orient was the increase in trade. With the advent of trade and the increase in trade contacts, where the traders and merchants from other countries came to our country or to other oriental countries there was, they got to have a firsthand experience of our culture, our tradition, and they captured these things in their writings and also in their artworks.

And it is, to some extent, we can say that India entered into the realm of European imagination, with the increase in trade contacts. The works of Islamic historians and philosophers also propagated the Oriental narrative. The, within the 16th and 17th centuries, there was a heightened increase in the curiosity about India and that in turn evoked the travelers tales.

When I talk about the, relationship of curiosity of Westerners and, and the relationship of that, with that of the traveller tales, it must be understood that it is, it is a double edged process. India was actually looked up as an exotic country, a land which is rich in culture, rich in, which is very fertile in every sense, and it was mostly exoticised to a great extent.

And as a result, people were very curious to know about this country a lot. So the people who came as travellers used to write a lot about the country. And there were a lot of traveller's tales that evolved out of this, that is one aspect. The other aspect is that, because there were a lot of traveller's tales, which, which talked about the beauty of our country, or which talked about the aspects of our country, people became extremely curious because there were a lot of people who were talking about this.

So people became extremely curious about it and they wanted to know what exactly this country is. So you can understand how during this period of orientalism how India emerged in the European imagination and how people started to recognize and started to take an interest in the country.

The other important factor during this age was the advent of European missionaries in our country. With the increase of European missionaries coming to India there was a proliferation of translated text. Some of the examples that I can cite is the one by Manoel de Oliveira. She translated the Dnyaneshwari from Marathi into Portuguese; Robert Nobili, translated

Christian doctrines into Tamil. When you look at the translation, this idea of translation of Christian doctrines into Tamil this actually rings a bell with what John Wyclif did during Reformation in England.

During that period, he translated Bible from Latin to the layman's language that is what, into the vernacular language so that people can easily read the religious texts and they can understand what these texts really stand for. The same thing was happening here as well. When these European missionaries came to India, they did not speak Indian language or they did not, they were, they did not understand the ways and customs of the regional people.

For the regional people to identify themselves with these religions and for them to actually understand what these religious texts stands for, it was important for the missionaries to translate those texts into regional languages so that they can associate, the layman can associate themselves, with these regional texts, religious texts, and they will be able to understand the full essence of Christianity.

Let us now talk about the British presence and translation, the correlation of it. The British presence was actually felt mainly during the era of, during the years of 1770 and 1785. This can be seen as a formative period during which this British successfully began the program of appropriating Indian languages. In the year 1772, Warren Hastings was appointed as a Governor General of Bengal. He was very curious and learned about Indian culture and contributed immensely towards the country's cultural renaissance.

At his behest, many British administrators and merchants mastered local languages and customs. He even wrote the introduction to the English translation of Bhagavad Gita, which was translated by Charles Wilkins. In the year 1778 Nathaniel Brassey Haldhed, a grammar of the Bengal appeared, and many other similar works were published during this time.

When one thinks about the British presence in the Indian subcontinent, the name that can be never be evaded is that of Sir William Jones. William Jones is considered to be one of the greatest oriental of all times. In 1783, he came to Calcutta as the judge of the Supreme Court, and the following year, he founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal to enrich Oriental Studies. And he also, this society mainly stood for the production and dissemination of cultural information about India.

So, William Jones is credited for the translation of the famous work of Kalidasa which is Abhigyan Shakuntalam. Kalidasa's Shakuntalam, Abhigyan Shakuntalam, was translated from Sanskrit into English as Shankuntala and it was published in the year 1789 by Sir William Jones. This is considered to be the first Indian work to receive popularity widely among the European audience, and it helped to garner a lot of people's attention into Indian writings, Indian literature and so on.

Sir William Jones firmly believed that in order to establish a standard of justice, it is important to comprehend Indian laws. He cited this as a major reason for him to master Sanskrit. We must understand that he was the judge of the Supreme Court, so he genuinely wanted to know the ways and practices of the Indian soil. So he took interest in learning Sanskrit so that he can understand the laws better.

I quote what he says, "I have left orders at Banaras and Gaya both holy cities for the oldest books on the Hindu laws to be translated from the Sanskrit, which I am most tempted to learn that I may be a check on the pundits of the court", I unquote. He, sir William Jones embarked on the project of compilation of all Hindu and Muslim laws, and he wanted to translate all this into English, but he was not able to complete his project, this project because of his untimely death.

Later, this project was completed by Henry Thomas Colebrooke. And he, he also brought in the seminal work, the digest of Hindu law on contracts and successions in the year 1798. When we talk about the Christian missionaries that came into Indian subcontinent, one must understand that along with them, a lot of other factors came into our country. One was the establishment of printing press.

One such popular press was a Serampore mission press, which was a book and newspaper publisher that operated in Serampore Danish India. The press was founded by William Carey, William Ward, and other British Baptist missionaries and the Serampore mission. The press published religious Christian tracks, Indian literary works, translations of the Bible in 25 Indian vernaculars and other South Asian languages.

The translation of the Bible was the most important work that this missionary press did and it actually helped in, help the layman to read the Bible, the religious texts in their own language so that they can understand the text comprehensively. The Serampore mission press became

the largest establishment in Asia, and they translated dictionaries, grammar, textbooks, literary journals and newspapers in addition to translating Bible.

On 10th July 1800, the Governor General of British India, Lord Wellesley founded Fort William college, which was an academy of Oriental Studies and a center of learning. Thousands of books were translated from Sanskrit, Arabia, Persian, Bengali, Hindi and Urdu at this institution. Fort William College in the training British officials in Indian language the charter of the college was before any civilian could obtain a degree, he was required to demonstrate his knowledge of the native languages.

Now let us look at the religious texts that were translated. Initially, the religious tracks were translated via Persian language versions that already existed. So, it was like a double translation, it was these religious texts earlier existed in Persian language and then it was from those but, from the Persian language, it got translated again to English rather than a direct translation.

But when Britishers came to India, and when they started to learn Indian languages, thanks to the help of the Fort William College, they were actually very good, they became very good at the Indian language. They were very proficient in Indian language that they could easily translate the original Indian texts into English rather than depending on the Persian text. The idea of the religious texts available in Persian language it must be taken into consideration.

The first translation of Sanskrit work into Persian can be traced back to the sixth century. A far more concerted effort became evident during the reign of Akbar. Akbar's interest in translating Sanskrit was, to Sanskrit texts were unparalleled. He sent him a special bureau of translations and employed the best Persian and Sanskrit scholars to translate Panchatantra, Ramayana, Mahabharata and Yog Vashisht among thousands of other words.

These translations introduced Indian works outside the country, generating interest even in Europe. The translators and compilers of religious texts were predominantly British, and they carried it through assistance and intermediaries who were Indians. One such intermediary was Mohan Prasad Thakur, who was an assistant librarian at the college and he helped in bringing the English Bengali vocabulary in the year 1810.

Now let us look at the early Indian translators. Maharaja Kali Krishan Bahadur, translated Muhammad Ghara a collection of gnostic verses. Gnostic verses are nothing but meaningful

sayings in verse, which expresses general truths about the world. The poetry is laced with proverbs, aphorisms and maxims. He also translated parts of Navaratna that belong to the anthology of didactic verses. Didactic verses just like gnomic verses are, are, are intended to instruct.

All the gnomic verses generally talk about they are meaningful (saving), sayings and they are mostly proverbial in nature, these didactic verses were aimed to instruct people directly. Mostly these didactic verses contained clear moral messages to be conveyed to its readers. I would, I will be reading a short, an excerpt from the work Navaratna which was translated by Maharaja Kali Krishan Bahadur.

I quote, “beggars are ever treated with contempt. The licentious are constantly subject reproach. The ungenerous incessantly defeated. Vicious individuals rejoice in the vices of others. The poor ever meet with disappointment, a fickle minded are ever uneasy. Mournful people are most suspicious”. Apart from Kalidasa’s Shakuntala, which was translated into English there are a lot of other works of his which were translated into English and one such work is Kalidasa’s Meghaduta.

Meghaduta is the lyric love poem, which was composed in fifth century. It is the, it is in the form of lament of an exiled Yaksha. Yaksha is a benevolent nature spirit, who is pining for his beloved on a lonely mountain peak. Kalidasa’s Meghaduta was translated in 1813 by Horace Hayman Wilson. He was an assistant surgeon to East, East India Company, and the work was dedicated to the Earl of Minto, Governor General of India.

Now let us see what modern Indology is. Indology is the academic study of history and cultures, languages and literature of India. Specifically Indology includes the study of Sanskrit literature and Hinduism along with other Indian religions, like Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, and also Pali literature.

Some scholars distinguish classical Indology with that of modern Indology. Classical Indology essentially deals with the works in Sanskrit. And it mainly focuses on ancient languages whereas modern Indology focuses on contemporary India, its politics and sociology. The Fort William College in Calcutta, focused mainly on Oriental Studies. Although it was primarily for the British and by the British. It ended up fueling the Bengal Renaissance and played a pivotal role in the emergence of Calcutta as an intellectual hub.

It was with the encouragement and cooperation of the College of Fort William that technology of printing and publishing vernacular books began and the collaborative learner institutions were established. This fort, the Fort William College, also became one of the primordial structures that, that focused on Oriental Studies and this institution was replicated in England, Europe and the United States. This country, this institution still continues the study of Indian texts and translation projects to this day.

Let us now look at the translation of the epics. India has given two jewels to world literature in the form of epics, one being Ramayana and the other being Mahabharata. There are a lot of translations that are being made during this period— the Ramayana and Mahabharata were translated into English, and a lot of translators actively involved, were actively involved in this process of translation.

One such translation was done by T.H Griffith, he translated Ramayana during the period 1870 to 1875. Manmatha Nath Dutt brought in a seven volume translation of Mahabharata by 1895 and Romesh Chunder Dutt translated Ramayana in the year 1899. When we think about epics, it is important to understand that these epics were written in Sanskrit which was the language of the courts during that time. So it was a courtly language so, almost all the texts, all the important epics and religious texts were written in Sanskrit.

But India being a multilingual country, it was extremely important to translate the Sanskrit texts into regional texts as well as into English. Although Valmiki's Ramayana is the most authoritative telling of Ram Katha in India, there are other texts in regional languages that are generally recognized as, as authoritative as the original retelling. The first one is the Ramcharith. Ramcharith Manas of Tulsi Das which is written in Hindi, and the other being Kamban's Tamil work Ramavataram.

Now let us look at the translation during the period of 19th century. It was a period of reawakening of, to our culture to what India stands for. It was a period of renaissance and at the end of the 19th century, there was redefining and representing of the past and there were a lot of writers who understood the importance of our rich tradition and its culture.

And they, they, they felt that it is important for them to bring out these texts to the limelight. They wanted to foreground these texts to reclaim their culture, reclaim a refined culture. And one such person who, who boosted this process was Ram Mohan Roy. He is considered to be the father of Indian renaissance and he played a pivotal role in reclaiming our past.

Let us now look at some vernaculars and secular literatures that are being translated. One such is the Chronicles of Unnao, it was a collection of Urdu Hindi ballads from early 18th century. It was translated in 1863 by Sir Charles Alfred Eliot. It talks about the Rajput resistance to their Muslim overlords. Another work being The Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan by GA Grierson, it came in, it came out in the year 1888.

The Modern Vernacular Literature of Hindustan distinguishes branches and periods of Hindi literature. In addition to the classical languages and texts, many vernaculars as well as secular literatures were translated and documented in this phenomenal work, and it, it influenced the writings of, the future writings immensely. During this period a lot of texts were translated and, and many journals such as Indian Antiquity, actually documented these works and, and this journal actually helped to record Indian folklore.

The folk tales from Punjab and parts of central India were documented. And it must be taken into consideration that the translations of these regional texts were carried out wholly or partially by civil servants and novelists. TW Rhys David's translation of Pali Jatakas in six volumes between 1877 and 1896 was one such translation.

We have now looked at translation in oriental period, in the period of awakening, and now let us look at translation during the independent India and why it was important for us to have translation during this era.

The Independent India emphasized its rich and continuous cultural heritage and it also projected the idea of unity in diversity. Without translation, the projection of ideas and concepts such as Indian literature, Indian culture and Indian philosophy would have been impossible. Translation strengthened our democracy by establishing equality among different languages, and it extended the scope of languages and reframed the boundaries.

The regional traditions became manifestations of a larger pan-Indian spirit. After the independence of our country, a lot of institutions came into being to recognize Indian writings and one such being the Sahitya academy. It was, Sahitya Academy was the National Academy of letters which was established in the year 1954. It is responsible for commissioning and publishing translations of India's regional literatures.

The Sahitya academy award is conferred annually on writers of the most outstanding books of literary merit published in any of the major Indian languages. In 1989, awards for



translations were instituted and bestowed annually on writers for their outstanding translations of major works in other languages into one of the major Indian languages. After the Indian Academy one must not also forget the kind of work that the US State Department does to help, help Indian students to do research in this fertile field of Indian languages.

So, for these, scholarships such as Ford and Fulbright grants are given to Indians to pursue higher studies in the US. And it must also be noted that importance to India is given amidst the South Asian languages. These scholarships are one among the United States cultural exchange programs whose goal is to improve intercultural relations, cultural diplomacy, and intercultural competence between the people of United States and other countries through the exchange of personal knowledge and skills.

One of the important name or the one of the important person who was a recipient of this Fulbright scholarship was AK Ramanujan. AK Ramanujan was a renowned Indian poet and scholar of Indian literature, who wrote both in English and Kannada. He was a Fulbright scholar at Indiana University. Besides being a poet, he was a translator himself who facilitated the introduction of ancient Indian texts as well as modern regional writers like U.R. Ananthamurthy, to the world outside.

He was a central figure in the awakening of new interest in Indian languages other than Sanskrit. His translations ranged from classical and Bhakti poetry in Tamil, poetic aphorisms in Kannada, Bhakti and Kotli literatures in Telugu, folktales and women's oral narratives written in 19th century and the poetry and prose of India after independence.

In this video, we have looked at the emergence of translation in India and how it became a decisive force along the period of time. Although there is an increased encouragement for regional lang-um, literatures being translated the, there, actually the majority of works are being translated into English and it in turn gives a greater visibility for the text not only in the Indian subcontinent but also to the people outside India.

I, we have put, I have put up a bibliography for your reference. Thank you all for listening. Thank you.