CHAPTER IV
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Translation as Creative Writing

The abrogation of the prejudiced-standardized codes and dated translation theories has catapulted into great epistemic shift in the approach, formulated by modern translation theorists. Translation has been given the status of ‘Creative Writing’ or ‘New Writing’ disregarding the traditional notion that it is mere rendering of SL text into TL text. What has only recently begun to be discussed, however, is not unknown to the people in the East i.e. India to be precise. The West has emerged with theories and propositions, which were integral part of Indian translation activity and Indian literary history till the advent of British colonisers.

Indian culture as we know of it today is the result of a magnificent experiment in translation. Our literary tradition of writing commentaries on the Upanishads, the Gita or the translation of great epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata empowers us to treat translation as new writing. Sujit Mukherjee emphatically states that,

Until the advent of western culture in India, we had always regarded translation as new writing.

This can be demonstrated most easily in the career of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana in various Indian languages. The Pampabharata and the Pandava-vijaya, for example, are complete and self-contained literary works, irrespective of their sources (77).
Mukherjee further states that,

New literary texts derived from itihasa or purana sources are obvious examples of this process. The erratic passage of Gunadhya’s *Brihatkatha* into other languages would be a more typical instance of how later authors used an existing story and remade it to suit their own purposes. (77)

Old Indian classics have undergone translations into countless regional languages and in each case it has been treated as new writing. These translated texts were regarded as autonomous creations and were equivalent to Creative Writing in status. Thus, we have Sarala Das’ ‘*The Mahabharata*’ in Oriya, Kasiram Das’ version in Bengali, Viswanath Satyanarayan’s *Ramayana Kalpa Vrukshamu* in Telugu and in our century C.Rajgopalchari’s translations into English of both the epics, *The Ramayana* and *the Mahabharata* have been considered popular as well as suitable examples of ‘New Writing’ or ‘Creative Writing’. Thus, ancient scholar and translators have viewed translation as new writing and a creative process. In the recent times, scholars like Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (*The Palace of Illusions* – English), Virappa Moili (*Ramayana Mahanveshanam* – Kannada) and Mallika Sengupta (*Sitayan*) have treated the great epic *The Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana* from a different perspective.

Divakaruni’s writing is an act of restoring the past through histories, imagination and magical realism. Chita Banerjee Divakaruni’s approach towards *the Mahabharata* is characteristically different since it is the poignant women
characters who call out to her. Gandhari with her blindfold, Kunti, the mother of all mothers and of course headstrong Draupadi, the catalyst for the 'Great War'. Divakaruni always wanted to know more about the women characters who were always on the edge of the story. She had to create something new out of it. She didn't want to retranslate the Mahabharata. In this connection, Sushila Singh observes:

The larger-than-life heroes, who peer through the world of Mahabharata, representing inspiring virtues and deadly vices with so many moral codes, capture the imagination of every child in India. But the women figures, though powerful and complex, attracting and directing the action in Mahabharata remain in shadow. Chitra Divakaruni, therefore, places women in the forefront of action in her new novel – a woman's Mahabharata – with women's joys and doubts, her struggles and her triumphs, her heartbreaks, her achievements, in the unique woman's way she tries to see the world – unfold and uncover the untold story of women's lives. Divakaruni's feat is to enter the consciousness of Draupadi (she likes to call her Panchaali) and tell the story of her life, to listen to her voice, grappling with her questions, thus envisioning the truth of alterity.

Similarly, Mallika Sengupta's Sitayan looks at what happened to Sita after Ram left her in the forest. It is retelling of the epic through the eyes of a woman.
On the other hand, Virappa's 'Ramayana Mahanveshanam' can be redesignated as 'Lakshmanayan' according to the eminent writer Indira Goswami. The Ramayana in Kanada written by Virappa Moli, ex-chief Minister of Karnataka, has been successfully translated again into Hindi (2nd part, out of the total five parts). Lakshmana, is the real hero of this modern Ramayana. He is not a mere shadow of Ram. This new perspective has changed and resituated other important characters like Ahalya, Surpanakha and important events like 'Sita's trial for chastity' have been given new dimension. Virappa's Ramayana reflects the secular, multicultural and democratic image of our Indian society. In this connection, I would like to comment that when an ancient epic is retold in a fast-changing socio-political scenario, its contextual-relevance also undergoes a radical change.

It is crystal clear from the above examples that the great epics still continue to fascinate and captivate the imagination of the modern scholars and authors. The new renderings are not being tried on the ground of 'faithfulness' or 'originality'. The act of translation has become creative. A translator not only interprets and translates the text but extends and re-creates the meaning of it.

B.K.Das aptly points out:

The modern languages of India have a long history of translation from Sanskrit as they are originated from Sanskrit. The literary traditions of these are full of examples of numerous
renderings of the epics of Sanskrit and other literatures. In the beginning of the literary tradition many of the modern Indian languages have remarkable translations. *Jnanesvari* in Marathi may be taken as an example. These translations did not care to follow a word for word and line for line rule. The conditions necessary for the study of these translations are not the target language and the source language or the mother tongue and the other tongue. The poets or writers trying native translations of Sanskrit texts regarded both the languages as their 'own' languages. They had a possessive sense for the Sanskrit heritage. But in translating the Sanskrit texts they wanted to free the scriptures from the monopoly of limited class of people. So these translations aimed at re-organizing the society. No theory with a special linguistic orientation can be enough to grasp the total magnitude of this traditional Indian translation activity. (23)

It is true that translation from 'deb bhasha' (Sanskrit) into the regional languages was not allowed in order to safeguard the Brahminical monopoly and their undisputed hold on power and knowledge. The Brahmin class claimed its monopoly on the ancient Sanskrit texts like *Veda, Vedanga*, etc. by arguing that they were 'revealed' texts and that translation into any other vernacular language may defile them. If permitted, it would give an accessibility to this knowledge and inadvertently lessen the hegemony of this Brahminical class. The Sanskrit texts were freed from Brahmin hegemony and these translations (that subverted texts written in Sanskrit) challenged the metaphysical notion of authorship, by situating
texts materially. The translations of these classics into regional languages were taken as 'new writings' or 'creative writing'. Indian literary tradition treats translation as an autonomous creation equal to that of creative writing. K.Ayyappa points out:

If the local/regional versions of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* became the classics of the regional literatures, the reason is not far to seek. These adapted translations were well received by the public in each region. There was nothing 'alien' about them. (130)

Thus, we find that demon Ravana, who is regarded as a negative character in North India, is worshipped with great fervour and given the status of God in South India. And all these varied interpretations have emerged from one fountainhead! The way a critic first deconstructs (decentres) the text and then reconstructs (recentres) it, in the same manner a translator first de-codes an SL text and then re-codes it in the target language. In the present age, a critic is considered as not merely an interpreter but a co-creator. If so, then translation should also be treated as creative work. A translator is not a mere renderer of an SL text into TL text. He too then is a co-creator for he recreates an SL text in a new way in the target language. Two significant anthologies of translation of our time, namely *New Writing in India* (1974) edited by Adil Jussawalla, and *Another India* (1990) edited jointly by Nissim Ezekiel and Meenakshi Mukherjee bear testimony to how translations read like New Writings.
The concept of translation as creative writing can be apprehended better if we analyze the work of self-translators and transcreators. Self-translators take liberty with the original writing and present it in a different way in the target language. Rabindranath Tagore’s *Gitanjali* in English is remarkably different from the Original Bengali poems. He takes liberty with the details and transcreates it in English. Therefore his poems are not translations into the target language but new writings. Take for example, the lines that read in Bengali as,

Ki nirikhe aaji, e ki afuraan lila,
  e ki nabanita bohe antoshila
Puratan bhasha more elo jobe mukhe
  Nabogan hoye gumri uthilo buke,
Puratan path shesh hoye gelo jetha
  Sethaye amaare anile notun deshe.

*(Gitanjali)*

The English translation reads like this:

But, I find that thy will known no end in me. And when old words die out on the tongue, new melodies break forth from the heart; and where the old tracks are lost, new country is revealed with its wonders. *(Gitanjali – Song Offering, XXXVII)*

Rabindranath Tagore’s attitude to the target language and audience made him change the tone, imagery and diction of his original Bengali poems. He shows
how the functions of the target text are decided by the nature of its audience (target reader) and by the role it (target text) is expected to perform in the target culture. In *Translation, Colonialism and Poetics: Rabindranath Tagore in two worlds* Mahasweta Sengupta examines Tagore's auto-translations and shows how, "...Tagore inhabits two different worlds when he translates from the originals; in his source language, he is independent and free of the trappings of an alien culture and vocabulary and writes in the colloquial diction of the actually spoken word, when he translates, he enters another context, a context in which his colonial self finds expression." (qtd. In Bassnett.S and Lefevere.A.59) Tagore was regarded in the West not as an artist as in Bengal or India but as a mystic and a saint, someone who has a message of peace for the strife-torn West. Similarly, just like transcreators, the bilingual writers of our country write in their mother tongue (language 1) and also in the second language (language 2, normally English). Their writings in both Language 1 and Language 2 should be hailed as 'new writings' or 'creative writings'. They are not mere translations from Source Language into Target Language.

Hence, Transcreation (P.Lal's term) actually means recreating an SL text in the target language taking absolute liberty with the original text and yet remain faithful to it. The versions of *the Ramayana* and *the Mahabharata* into English by R.K.Narayan and Rajaji respectively can be taken as examples of transcreation. Sujit Mukherjee quotes the introductory note of P.Lal's verion of *Shakuntala*:
Faced by such a variety of material, the translator must edit, reconcile and transmute: his job in many ways becomes largely a matter of transcreation. (9)

We have a vast body of bilingual writers like Manoj Das, Kamala Das, Jayanta Mahapatra etc. and self-translators like Rabindranath Tagore, Girish Karnad etc. who have enriched Indian body of literature called Indian literature in English translation. Whether one translates or transcreates, the original work or the Source Text is renewed by being rendered into another language.

Though Sanskrit and other major regional languages have a flourishing literary tradition, they have not given rise to any significant and original literary theory. The 'Rasa' theory is self-sufficient, still critics are dubious about its application and how it can be pressed into service for analysing modern Indian writings. This conspicuous absence of a valid literary theory was certainly not a result of ignorance in the field. Medieval India produced novel poetics, various forms of poetry and communication but never came up with theory of literature. It is so, because of a conscious and collective decision to do away with any literary theory. Indian writers had managed and flourished without literary theory. The history of literature in Indian languages shows that literary theory is in no way the pivot of literary growth.

The famous German Indologist Max Muller has glorified Indian in his famous essay *India: What Can it Teach Us?* in no uncertain terms. He writes:
If I were to look over the whole world to find out the country most richly endowed with all the wealth, power and beauty that nature can bestow— in some ways a very paradise on earth—I should point to India. If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life and had found solutions to some of them, I should point to India. And if I were to ask myself from what literature we, in Europe, may draw that corrective which is most wanted in order to make our life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact more truly human, a life not for this life only, but a transfigured and eternal life—again I should point to India. (2)

All of a sudden there was a shift in the literary and cultural priorities during colonial period. The need to have a theory of literature was observed in modern India only after the arrival of the British with their education system. Moreover, absence of a valid theory sent the literary practitioners into the arms of British intelligentsia. Everything British was treated to be inherently good and it generated a desire for a rapid Westernisation. Western translation practice is seen oscillating back and forth between close fidelity (to the original) and complete freedom (from the original). Modern Indian practice influenced unavoidably by the West also swings between the same extremes. Translation practice in India varies from period to period. Translation was a kind of new writing in the pre-colonial period and during the colonial period; it was highly influenced by the British translators and writers. Sujit Mukherjee gives a clear picture of it in the following passage:
Rupantar (meaning 'changed in form' or 'in changed form') and anuvad (speaking after or 'following after') are the commonly understood senses of translation in India, and neither term demands fidelity to the original. The notion that even literary translation is a faithful rendering of the original came to us from the West, perhaps in the wake of the Bible and the need felt by Christian missionaries to have it translated into different Indian languages. (80)

In the West, the history of Bible translation is in a sense the history of 'western culture in microcosm'. McGuire states that:

The first translation of the complete Bible into English was the Wycliffite Bible produced between 1380 and 1384, which marked the start of great flowering of English Bible translations linked to changing attitudes to the role of the written text in the Church, that formed part of the developing reformation." (46)

The western concept of translation and translator has undergone a sea change over the last three centuries. This is because of the fast changing cultural history of the West. The view of the translator as a 'shadowy presence' by Steiner and the view of Larbaud on the 'translator as a beggar at the church door'. (qtd. In McGuire, 75) is obviously a post-Romantic notion. The concept of translation has acquired a new dimension in the twentieth century – particularly with the emphasis on language and role of language in literature. Since, no two languages function
alike, no two readings are identical. Thus, no translator can claim to have fathomed the author’s meaning completely and accurately. As a result, even the nature of translation theory cannot be universally uniform. All this point to the fact that translation activity is deeply rooted in practical application.

In the post-1980 period, translation has been given a position equal to that of the original by critics and translators like Lambert, Van Gorp, Theo Hermans, Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida, Horaldo and Augusto de Campos, Helene Cixous and a few others.

In Gentzler’s words:

The focus is translation investigation is shifting from the abstract to the specific, from the deep underlying hypothetical forms to the surface of texts with all their gaps, errors, ambiguities, multiple referents, and “foreign” disorder. These are being analyzed – and not by standards of equivalent / inequivalent, right/wrong, good/bad, and correct/incorrect. (4)

Truly then “original” has no fixed identity or meaning that can be aesthetically or scientifically determined. The connotation changes each time it passes into translation. In the flux of intertextuality, we are confronted with questions like ‘what exists before the original’ and the like. Octavio Paz in his short work on translation claims:
All texts, being part of a literary system descended from and related to other systems, are 'translations of translation of translations':

Every text is unique and, at the same time, it is the translation of another text. No text is entirely original because language itself, in its essence, is already a translation: firstly, of the non-verbal world and secondly, since every sign and every phrase is the translation of another sign and another phrase. However, this argument can be turned around without losing any of its validity: all texts are original because every translation is distinctive. Every translation, up to a certain point, is an invention and as such it constitutes a unique text.

(qtd, in McGuire 38)

We find Eagleton almost echoing Octovio Paz's contention. In the changing circumstances, the 'originality' of the original text is being questioned. In the West, translation used to be considered as secondary and inferior to the original. But, the concept of intertextuality has given us the idea that even the original text is in a sense a translation. Thus, in the light of recent semiotic enquiry, terms like 'secondary' and 'faithful' are no longer tenable. Eagleton observes:

Every text is a set of determinate transformations of other, preceding and surrounding texts of which it may not even be consciously aware; it is within, against and across these other texts
that the poem emerges into being. And these other texts are, in their turn, 'tissues' of such pre-existent textual elements, which can never be unravelled back to some primordial moment of 'origin'.

(quoted in McGuire, 104)

Thus, the well known dictum of the Italian critic, Benedetto Croce's "Traddutore-traditore" (the translator is a traitor, a falsifier of the original) and the cynical observation that "Translation is like a Woman if beautiful, it cannot be faithful and if faithful, it cannot be beautiful"—Anon (quoted in Krishnaswamy et al, 235) is a bit passé now. In the West they believed that Translation comes after the original and thus it is dependent on it and secondary to the original. In an age, when it is believed that the definitive text belongs only to religion or fatigue, the post-structuralists have done well to underline the fallacy of believing in a single and definitive reading of a text, a work of translation cannot be dismissed as inferior to the original or even, secondary to the primary text. Translation is as creative as the original writing itself. Just because the original comes before the translation does not mean that the original text is superior to the translated version. They are complementary to one another. Alexis Nouss has rightly pointed out:

The translated text exists through its difference from the original, and the original makes known and legitimizes its own existence only in and through translation. Each refers irremediably to the other. Neither exists completely separately; the existence of each is interwoven-metissage-with that of the other (146).
It is pertinent to note here that Translation is necessary for the survival of the original beyond its life time as translation has already been accepted as 'after life' and also beyond the source language (the language in which the source text was originally written). Otherwise, the original text will die a natural death. For example, we read Chaucer's works in translation into modern English because Chaucer's language is not intelligible to us. Translation of Chaucer's works has ensured his survival in English literature. Truly then it is, 'translate or die.'

We cannot possibly subvert a translated text as it is always a metatext or a text about a text. Popovic argues in course of an article Translation as Communication about the nature of target text. He asserts, “A target text is a metatext — not only because it imitates the source text but because it differs from the source text, and that the way a target text chooses to differ from the source text is indicative of the target text's conception of textuality.” — (qtd. in Zellermayer, 75-76). The difference between the source text and the target text is a 'shift of expression'. This 'shift of expression' makes translation a 'new writing' or 'creative writing'.

The line of demarcation between the source and target or mother and the other or primary and secondary or original and imitation has really disappeared. Translation as new writing or creative writing is the literary artefact born out of multiculturalism and globalization. K.Chellappan has rightly suggested that "this complex activity is not only an inter-language event but also a cross-cultural communication because all linguistic signs are part of a larger social system of
values. But good translations become creations or transcreations by exploiting this very gap of creativity" (159). It is believed that the translator is invisible – he merely ferries the text across languages. But this is not true. A translator is both the reader and the writer. Just as the original text bears the interior signature of the author, the translated text bears the interior signature of the translator. Since, he creates something new, he should be accorded the status of a creative writer.

In creative translation, several stages of back transformation can also suddenly result in a novel synthesis. Horst Frenz holds a similar view on the subject: "Two spheres of languages move closer together through the medium of the translator to fuse at the moment of the contact into a new form, a new Gestalt" (120). The translator then transforms an SL text to a TL text by bringing a 'semantic compatibility' between the two and creates something new in the target language taking the ingredients of the Source Language. This is perhaps what Steiner hints at when he says that "at its best the peculiar synthesis of conflict and complicity between a poem and its translation into another poem creates the impression of a 'third language' or a medium of communicative energy which somehow reconciles both languages in a tongue deeper, more comprehensive than either (29).

As mentioned earlier the concept of translation as creative writing or new writing was in vogue in the East, from the days of Purana. There is a fundamental difference between Western and Eastern attitude to translation. When translation
was condemned as 'subsidiary and derivative' in the West, in India, it was traditionally considered as 'new writing'.

Issues like 'anxiety of exactness' or 'true to the original' both in letter and spirit did not disturb the Indian translators up to the nineteenth century. Sanskrit epics and puranas continued to be adapted and translated into various regional languages successfully. But the modern Indian translators were highly influenced by the Western peers and Western theories. This Eurocentric attitude made them insist on exact equivalence and they deviated from the path shown by their predecessors. However, in the second-half of the twentieth century both Eastern and Western translators have taken translation not only as 'New Writings' but as literature three.

Let us now examine the following Venn diagrams.
Diagram No.1 – represents translation activity between two regional languages where 'A' stands for source language, 'B' stands for Target Language and 'C' stands for Translated Text.

When a translator translates from one regional language to another regional language, say from Oriya to Bangla then the task becomes comparatively easier as the two languages share not only a common culture but even some parts of their respective vocabularies. Thus, there is nothing 'alien' and the translator creates an 'original version' of the original text.

Diagram No.2 – represents translation activity between two languages that do not share a common culture and world view. 'A' stands for the source language, 'B' stands for the Target Language and 'C' stands for the Translated Text.
When a translator translates from one language (foreign) into another that does not share a common culture, the process becomes conditioned by many compromises one way or the other. The diagram shows the minimum area shared by the source language and target language and the inherent difficulties make it more challenging. Say from Sanskrit into English, the work of translation becomes more demanding and creative. Since, the translator recreates the alien (Sanskrit) into his language (English). The linguistic and temporal differences have to be absorbed and recreated in the target language to make readable translation. The translator passes tangentially through the circles in this case (representing two different cultures) and the cultural impediments itself make him recreate an original text in the SL.

Whether one translates, transcreates, adapts or transforms, the original work is always renewed by being rendered into another language. In this regard, I would like to put forward a few points that will support my contention.

1. The presence of the source text itself imposes certain constraints on the translation activity. The translator’s wrestle with words in an attempt to externalise someone else’s vision in some other medium in his own medium results in an original recreation of the original. It is a paradox that the constraints itself empower and enhance the creativity of the translation act by placing the translator in a position of striving to overcome them. Creation is thus a paradox.
2. It is a fact that creativity develops in the interplay between given 'extra-intra textual' constraint and individual freedom.

3. Translation theories have buttressed the translation practice since time immemorial. The question then is, could knowledge of theory actually help a translator to be creative? The answer is an emphatic 'no'. A theory is essentially an explanation of practice and cannot therefore dictate practice. And if at all it did then it would lose its explanatory power. The truth is, what one might intuitively expect to hamper creative freedom in translation in fact serves to enhance it. I would like to modify the impression in some circles that transcreation involves wide departures from the original. It in fact is the closest to the original. Now if the notion of translation has changed over the years, what role should a translator assume? A good translator recreates the original by fusing the two language systems (the SL and TL) through transcoding. He doesn't engage himself in reclothing old meanings into new forms, but recreates a new form-meaning synthesis. K.Chellappan observes:

A good translator thus uses the target language itself in such a way that it comes closer to the inner language (and it is the deeper bond that between the various constituents that is recovered) – and the inner form of the original; and the archetypal form and the core language are realised in the new text in its own way. (164)
The very act of translation puts the translator through the agonies and ecstasies of authorship. Hence, translation is a creative work and is its own reward. V.S. Naravane writes:

No poet can turn into a translator unless he feels a subtle continuity between the work of original composition and the labour expended on interpreting the work of a kindred soul. In becoming a translator he does not cease to be personal. Through a remarkable paradox, the self-obliteration that translation involves itself becomes a means of self-expression. The translator has therefore been rightly described as 'a character in search of an author', he finds the author first in another and then within himself. (qtd. in Nandakumar, 67).

Translation, without doubt, can be accorded the status of creative writing or new writing. And Indian literary history acts as the mirror – it mirrors the past and reflects or serves as guidance for the future. In Ibne Isha's words: "The very first lesson of geography informs us that the earth is round. No doubt, it used to be flat earlier but later it was found to be round. The benefit of its being round is that people go to the east but emerge in the west" (qtd. in Singh, A. Kumar., 27) Thus, we must discover our past heritage. Our ancient and indigenous concept of translation as 'New Writing' is being adopted, accepted and acknowledged in the West. This also proves that the West was pretty late in catching up with the East and we
must subjugate our westward march. The translator must necessarily look up to the western theories as they are standards not to confirm but to deviate from. The translator has outgrown the concept of being taken as a mere renderer of an SL text into a TL text and become a creator. Given its renewed status, a translator must exercise a free play of imagination. But at the same time, he should exercise maximum freedom within the periphery of togetherness. Only then can one experience unalloyed joy, the kind of joy one derives while reading various renderings of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. The concept of transcreation and transliteration has made translation activity 'creative'. As B.K.Das rightly says:

In the Indian context the translator has a great role to play. Several regional literatures of the country can reach all the Indian readers only through translation. So to say, India is a Paradise for translators and translation has a great scope in our country. Translation in the modern context is not secondary to original literature in the source language. It is not reproduction but recreation. It has become 'new literature' may be 'literature three' if you will, thanks to the recent discoveries in the field of linguistics and literary criticism. With the "indeterminacy of meaning" of a "text", the need for translation in the Modern World is now greater than every before. (7)

To conclude I should say that Indian literary tradition considers translation as an autonomous creation equal to that of creative writing. With the advent of
linguistics and criticism translation has become creative in the twentieth century – thanks to the concept of transcreation and transliteration which furthers the cause of translation activity. Translation through transliteration takes words from Source language to Target language and (in the process) helps to broaden the vocabulary range of Target language. It is replete with the excitement and joy of a voyage of discovery normally associated with an original work. Today 'Translation Studies' seems to focus not only on the source text, nor on the target text, but shifts its focus on how different discourses and semiotic practices are mediated through translation. Thus in the modern context, the difference between the source text and the target text is a 'Shift of expression'. This 'Shift of expression' makes translation 'new writing' or creative writing.

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