

A Critical Study of English Translations of Gujarati Fiction

by Women Writers

Executive Summary

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1. Research Methodology

This research is undertaken with a view to conduct a comparative study of select works of Gujarati fiction by women writers with their English translations. Theoretical framework used for the comparative analysis is, Andre Lefevere's theory of 'Translation as a Rewriting of the Original' and the four constraints proposed therein, which are: Ideology, Poetics, Patronage and the Universe of Discourse. The research aims to examine the translations from linguistic and cultural perspectives and from the perspective of different strategies applied by the translators' to deal with the various challenges posed by the translation process while transferring a text into a different language and culture.

The research commences with an overview of the general scenario of translation in Indian context with special focus on the region of Gujarat as it traces at the same time, the emergence of 'Translation Studies' as a major academic discipline giving rise to various translation theories. Then follows a detailed analysis of Lefevere's theory which, unlike the widely held translation theories, focuses on the deviations offered to the original text through the process of translation into target language (TL), in order to arrive at a better perspective of the entire process of 'translation as rewriting'.

The research then proceeds to survey the literature of the Gujarat region along with the socio-political contexts that have impacted socio-cultural realities as well as literature. The research takes note of the emergence of women writers on the literary spectrum and their special inputs in the treatment of various genres, narrative style and thematic aspects, particularly of the representation of women, their emotions and issues in their fiction. A comparative study of the fiction by male and female writers of the state has also been conducted in order to overview the treatment that women and women's issues have received at the hands of the writers of both genders and how far (or close) are representations of the female-self based on grounds of reality.

Another aspect of the research is to closely analyse how the woman subject has been 'rewritten' in translation when carried to a different lingua-cultural background and the multiple factors responsible not only for a different reading of the original text but also for an altered gendered image resulting at times in some ambiguity and misrepresentation of the image of women.

For my research I have implemented the following methods and considered the theoretical approaches to write my thesis.

- ❖ A thorough reading of the primary texts – select Gujarati fiction by women writers – in original and their English translations has been conducted.
- ❖ I have referred to books of history of Gujarat to develop a deeper understanding of the socio-historical and anthropological context of the region as well as the literature (both mainstream and folk/tribal literature) with a special focus on the condition of women in society during various phases and how literature captures the image, life and issues pertaining women.
- ❖ I have done a thorough reading of many Gujarati novels and short-stories by both male and female writers (apart from the primary texts) which revolves around the theme of women and their lives to get an overview of how the writers of this region deal with the phenomenon of gender representation with a special focus on their fresh inputs and approaches in terms of literary form, thematic engagement, language/syntax and characters during various literary phases. The rise and impact of Feminism and Feminist theory on the works of Gujarati women writers has also been delved into which helped me conduct a comparative study of the images of women in the fiction by the writers of both the genders.
- ❖ The research has explored the emergence and development of the discipline of ‘Translation Studies’ and its ascent to becoming a major branch of comparative and cultural studies along with the major Eastern and Western translation theories to investigate the difference between the perception towards translation in the East and the West. The research also explores into the scenario of translation with regard to the multi-lingual/cultural contexts of a country like India where translation has been part of the collective Indian consciousness. The scene, however, has altered considerably with the introduction of various Western translation theories. The question regarding the dearth of translation theory in India and the possible reasons for the same has also been addressed with the current situation of translation in context Indian context has been discussed at length.

- ❖ The research has engaged with a particular theory of translation as a theoretical framework for the analysis of the texts namely ‘Translation as Rewriting’ which has been proposed by a scholar Andre Lefevere in 1990 mainly in his book *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (1992) along with other texts and essays along with his concept of four constraints – ideology, poetics, patronage and Universe of Discourse – which play significant role in the process of rendering a SL text into TL.
- ❖ A survey has been conducted of the scenario of translation in Gujarat, a general paucity of translation from Gujarati into other Indian languages or English, why translation activity has not been taken seriously in Gujarat, what are the factors responsible for it, how lately this activity has accelerated and the contribution of bilingual professionals, teachers, and publication houses to encourage this activity.
- ❖ Detailed analyses of how the linguistic and cultural barriers hinder the translation process often leading to ‘misrepresentation’ of the original expressions, nuances, connotations and situation has been conducted along with tracing the implications of the impact of Lefevere’s four constraints on the process by selecting excerpts from the original fiction and comparing them with their translations in English to scrutinize the different reading of both the texts in SL and TL following the discussion on the factors responsible for the same.
- ❖ Comparison of original Gujarati texts with their translations in English to analyse whether the image of women portrayed in the original is properly represented in the translation. To observe how at times translations manipulate the image to make it more adequate to the target reader and culture. Third World Feminism and Post-Colonial Gender Theory will be engaged to deal with issues of gendering and representation of women in the original and translation

2. Key Findings and Conclusion

The key findings of my research are listed below:

- 1) The comparison of the select Gujarati texts by women writers with their English translations from various dimensions like linguistic, stylistic and cultural taking into consideration the psychological perspective on the part of the translators to produce in the TL, a closely equivalent text which is able to produce a similar impact in a completely different language and culture, and ultimately to evaluate how far the translator has been successful in carrying forward the exact meaning and sense of the original has led me to a conclusion that the translators' efforts to make conscious choices at every stage results not just into loss of meaning resulting into ambiguity or mistranslation but it also adds new dimensions to the original text according to the contemporary poetics, thereby bestowing an afterlife to the text in new time for new readership.
- 2) The four constraints as mentioned by Lefevere in the famous translation theory he proposed – 'Translation as a Rewriting of the Original' namely ideology, poetics, patronage and the Universe of Discourse play active role in manipulating the image of the original text, writer etc. But apart from creating hindrance in the translation process, these constraints often help enhance the understanding of the translation process. These aspects are, in majority of the cases, the deciding factors when a translator decides to deviate from the original to create a different reading of the original in a completely different language/culture for different readership and possible reasons for the same.
- 3) The research aims to focus on the image of women as presented in literature and as a result I have examined the condition of women within the social and family unit during various political phases along the politics of patriarchy in form of the degrading condition of women in society and how the literature mirrors these realities of women. The arrival of women writers on the spectrum has been taken note of along with their literary efforts which helped bring new dimensions to the narrative styles, themes and genres in the literature of the region. Their noteworthy involvement was in their efforts to present an entire range of female traits, psyches, emotions, aspirations and challenges in form of their representation of their women characters in their fiction with an urgent appeal to bring reform in the condition and status of women. A comparative study of the representation of women in the literature by male

and female writers has been commenced to survey how women and their issues have been dealt with by them and the conclusions have emerged that male writers' projection of female self is mostly based on the expectation garnered from narratives of myth and patriarchy in the form of the idealized and stereotypical women characters found in majority of their literature with very little scope of positive realistic representation while a female writers' representation is more often based on the real experiences at physical and psychological levels of women as found around us. The arrival of prominent women writers on the spectrum during nineteenth century brought forth the promise of present fresh perspectives in the matters of theme, narrative style as well as presenting many unpaved areas of women's lives, sentiments and experiences. Initially women writers too were diffident to voice their innermost dilemmas and feelings but with the change of time and social realities, the image of women in literature goes through transformation and we come across women who are more confident and autonomous in the face of the changing socio-political realities of the Post-modern times. Over the period of times, women's writing has become more mature and honest in its representation of the inner most feelings and psychological trajectory of women-kind often exploring uncharted areas of femininity.

- 4) Another dimension of the research is to closely observe the impact the translation process has on the representation of women when carried forward to a completely different linguistic and cultural background. Translation not only creates a different reading of the original text due to a number of factors but it also affects the character portrayal. The altered image of the text and the characters can also be a result of the politics of translation on the part of the translator to propagate a particular ideology, to alter the general poetics, or for easy acceptance by the patrons (publishers) and target readers. In majority of cases, the translators have been faithful to the original writers in the matter of carrying forward the sense and purpose but at times they tend to take some liberties, in form of either undertranslation (omission of certain portions) or overtranslation (over explanation), due to personal prejudices or to match up to the contemporary poetics and ideology resulting into manipulation of gender connotations.

3. Suggestions and Recommendations

The research began with many speculations and at the end a researcher is expected draw a final conclusion to the research questions which resulted into formation of the thesis. However, a research is an ongoing process where instead of arriving at a definite answer, the query normally leads into many feasible research areas to be paved in future. In my case the research has two broad dimensions – ‘Translation’ and ‘Gender’ with many aspects at the backdrop. The rise of ‘Translation Studies’ and the booming translation industry in the twenty first century has opened up many vistas for the aspiring translators and researchers in form of fame and financial security but the focal point under consideration is the quality of translations produced on a large scale. Although there is ample number of translations theories available to assist translators in the challenging task of translating an SL text into a TL, the question is how much these theories should actually be considered while transforming or rewriting a text into different language. The dearth of any set guideline for the aspiring translators to make them better equipped with the technique of translation to be able to produce quality translation and help them deal with various hurdles at linguistic, cultural and stylistic levels can be a major setback as far as the quality of translated works is concerned. This research is a humble effort to spread awareness towards this practical aspect of the translation activity.

I offer to suggest here that more efforts are required in the direction of this much neglected aspect of practical translation, so as to create a better understanding of the process and to find out newer techniques and theories of translation to bring new perceptions to translation activity in real time. Many translation projects sponsored by UGC and universities are undertaken by researchers and academicians but there is hardly any awareness regarding the quality of works produced through such projects. So I recommend that bi-lingual writers, academicians and researchers can divert their attention towards this overlooked aspect and take up individual or funded projects for the same to help improve the quality and standard of translation and translated works.

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