

READING NEW MEANINGS IN TRANSLATED TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

This research concerns itself with the process of translation. If the act of reading and writing is a political act than translation is also a literary process which cannot sustain itself in vacuum. Translation is a process which is beyond verbatim understanding of a foreign language text. It is also about understanding the nuances of the culture to which a text belongs. This paper is an inquiry into such modes of translation where the translated text has emerged as something completely different giving new insight to its readers

KEYWORDS: Translation, Modes of Translation, Gendered Translation, Adaptation, Auteur in Translation, Benjamin Walter

INTRODUCTION

Benjamin's *Task of the Translator* begins by inquiring about the nature of art. Does a work of art concern itself with the receiver? Does a literary work say something? If an art work contains something "mysterious and unfathomable" than what does a translation really communicate? Benjamin defines translation as a mode. A mode through which one can only try to trace the unfathomable something. There is an acceptance that translations cannot be done in vacuum. Any translated text would be loaded with certain political affiliation along with tracing a certain unfathomable in a text. A translated text also generates new meanings in and around itself,

"Categories such as *nation*, *society* or *culture* could today be considered as 'translation zones. It seems to already be commonly accepted that translations, in addition to basic linguistic transference, also rewrite their respective contexts".

On the contrary Benjamin's essay aims to establish translation as a literary process in which "the original rises into a higher and purer linguistic air" without concerning itself about racial, social and political parameters which effects the translation.

If one considers that literary translation is not free from its sociological context and in the act of translating a certain text through our perspective we are not merely translating or rewriting a text in certain language but also adapting it simultaneously. Is than adaptation any different from translation? If one looks at it from a postcolonial perspective than translation is an activity which can be seen as an "act of resistance" whereas adaptation is an "act of appropriation". To go back to Benjamin and regard his argument about the "afterlife" of original text in translation this paper intends to look at three curious cases of such translations and adaptations of Hindi films which have been translated from a literary work to a movie. These are, Vijay Anand's *Guide* (1965) inspired from R.K Narayan's novel *The Guide*, Vishal Bharadwaj's *Omakara* (2006) translated from *Othello* a play by William Shakespeare and Dev.D (2009) by Anurag Kashyap adapted from Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's novel *Devdas*. This paper intends to look at these paraliterary translations which are

not just word to word translations from a text but also a set of interpretations from the source text. According to Julie Sanders “adaptations are reinterpretations of established texts in new generic contexts with relocations of a source texts cultural or temporal setting which may or may not involve a generic shift”

R.K Narayan’s *The Guide* is not some kind of a moral fable in which it was turned into in Dev Anand’s movie. *The Guide* novel is an ironic inquiry into human life and its aspirations. In the translation of the book into a movie Raju guide has been “exalted into a figure of a hero”. The film has intentionally done away with the fictitious town of Malgudi and has set it in the city of Udaipur. The intention is not to look at the clear cut differences in the movie and the book but instead to look at how the *Guide* movie is in harmony yet in contradictions with the source text. In the creation of the movie *Guide*; the auteur has created something entirely new. While doing away with the imaginative town of Malgudi the writer has also done away with the symbolic acceptance and awakening of “western ideas” in the town. In the novel Raju guide remains a “self deluded individual” till the end. The writer leaves his readers to look for answers in the last lines of the novel. R.K Narayan’s *Guide* was years ahead of its times, through the character of Rosie Narayan depicts a female bildungsroman. Towards the end of the book Rosie is not an “affirmation seeking wife or lover” she matures in the journey and tries to begin a new life through her art. In the movie she has been shown as a suicidal heroine who is dependent on a male figure for her salvation perhaps R.K Narayan’s Rosie would have been too rebellious for Indian audience so her character on screen was “bent and broken” but not in a better shape. The adaptation of the movie *Guide* is a case of a timeless novel being translated into a “pop art” which becomes outdated with time. Here Benjamin’s argument has been turned upside down and looks at the original or source text which is not constrained in its temporality.

“Fidelity and freedom in translation have traditionally been regarded as conflicting tendencies”. These tendencies reconcile themselves in Vishal Bharadwaj’s *Omkaara* which is adapted from Shakespeare’s play *Othello*. The film has been indianized in its context by removing the racial connotations attached to the play and re appropriating it through caste politics in northern town of India. The socio context of the movie has been changed entirely while retaining the themes of jealousy love and betrayal. Although translated into a foreign language the movie remains loyal to its source text unlike the movie *Guide*. The film produces same affect on its viewers as the play had on its readers. Both the viewers and the readers’ question Iago / Langda Tyagi’s intentional villainy in betraying Omkara / Othello in the film as well as in the play. The film much like the play ends with Desdemona murder and Othello’s eventual suicide. The essence of the film remains same as the original text. While considering the adaptations of various movies one has to keep in mind that “all movies are after all adaptations of screenplays”. Hence a text is not being directly translated from pages to the screen but also being translated into another form through screenplay.

Dev. D by Anurag Kashyup “is a modern-day take on Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay’s Bengali novel *Devdas*”. This film has been different from its earlier adaptations in various ways. The film is set in Delhi and Punjab with certain parts of the movie inspired from real life events which gives it a wider universal appeal. Instead of being an objective narrator Anurag Kashyup let his characters take the centre stage and let them narrate their stories from their point of view. So instead of being a classic love story Kashyup’s *Dev. D* emerges as a film with deep psychological underpinnings. The dividing line between the courtesan / prostitute Chanda and Devdas’s beloved Paro has been removed by subverting the context of the characters completely. A new reading of Chanda emerges as an innocent college going girl who might sell her body every night but would open up her soul only to a person with whom she can fall in love with. The movie gives a cathartic relief to its audience by not killing Dev in the story nearly after hundred years of its publication. Dev is shown to

live a happy life with Chanda doing way with his habit of drinking instead of dying on the footsteps of Paro's house .This has been the translation in which the 'auteur' has created something new ,something which has enriched the source text giving it an 'afterlife' .

From the above examples of the three movies the question which we seek to answer is that, is translation than any different from adaptation or is there a symbiotic relationship between the two? If translation gives us insight into a foreign culture than can we say that adaptation makes us look inwards into our own localized way of resolving conflicts. According to Katja Krebs

Translation and adaptation as both practices and products are an integral and intrinsic part of our global and local political and cultural experiences, activities and agendas .translation is pivotal to our understanding of ideologies, politics as well as culture, as it simultaneously constructs and reflects positions taken. Similarly, adaptation offers insights into as well as helps to establish cultural and political hegemonies (Krebs 3).

In light of the above comment it seems that translation and adaptation are closely linked. If we go back to Benjamin's essay on translation than we would realize that translation has a timeless appeal to it. Where as in adaptation the product acquires a new meaning but has a localized effect to it .Benjamin's theory of translation would regard adaptation as an inferior literary activity in which the poetic essence of the original work is lost. The adaptation of *The Guide* novel clearly strengthens this argument. The story of R.K Narayana's *Guide* is not a story of the rise of a hero from being a common man but it is about human experience which can never be translated but can only be felt by its receivers.

Even though talking about the unfathomable essence of work of art Benjamin considers art as a fragment of vessel in which translated text is another fragment of the whole,

Fragments of a vessel which are to be glued together must match one another in the smallest details, although they need not be like one another. In the same way a translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel (Benjamin 2).

According to me what Benjamin misses is that these fragments are bound to be abrasive when one tries to put them back together. As mentioned before translation discourse is not free from its political affiliation, even the mere act of translating a particular text situates the translator in an interpretative zone. While applauding Anurag Kashyap's interpretation of an innocent Chandramukhi what we ignore is that Kashyap gives a context to her being turned into a sex worker. Similar is the case with the movie *Guide* where Rosie has been given context to her hysterical outburst .While keeping this point in mind one can safely propose that the adaptations of above mentioned texts took place in and from a patriarchal point of view where the loose hero can salvage himself through death or suicide but such a choice has not been given to the translated heroines .While taking a feminist take on translation studies one opens up a panorama of whole lot of new meanings which are otherwise neglected

Vanessa Leonardi in her book *Gender and Ideology in Translation :Do women and men translate differently* talks about elitist and hypocritical translations which are targeted at specific group or audience , while analyzing the above adaptations of books one cannot ignore the fact that these visual adaptations are product of a male auteur .One can only envisage a possibility of a "transparent translation" which captures Desdemona's attraction for Othello not something

based on the attraction of “the other” or the dark but as something rooted in her freewill and spirit which fails to see the doomed after effects of their union .

To conclude and to disagree with Benjamin’s argument that a work of art doesn’t communicate anything to its receiver I suggest that a work of art is always a product of an ‘I’; it is reminiscent of the time which has passed. If art doesn’t say something to its receiver than it ceases to be an art, than Guernica by Pablo Picasso and a blank canvas would mean one and the same thing to its receiver. Hence translation of any art form is going back to that past all over again and trying to create images or vocabulary which would reconcile the two and connect its receiver to the art form.

CONCLUSIONS

Translation is a literary activity which connects the past with the present and gives an afterlife to the artefact which otherwise will loose it’s relevance with time

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