

## CRITIQUING LITERARY CRITICISM THROUGH TRANSLATION

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### Abstract

As literary criticism is a site of more questions and less answers, translation adds to these questions and renders it more fascinating than it already is. However, it is no less profound as an exercise to relate translation with literary criticism. For most of its long history, translation research has focused on a few issues related to linguistic transfer, such as translation techniques, translation strategies, translation standards, and translators' styles, and on slightly broader questions regarding the possibility of translation, or what translation scholars refer to as translatability. However, in the past few decades translation scholars have no longer limited themselves to these questions, and have begun taking a wide variety of different approaches to translation research. In addition to linguistics, literature, and foreign language education, researchers are now borrowing from a variety of other contemporary theories including literary hermeneutics, reception aesthetics, feminism, deconstruction, and postcolonialism. The broadening of translation studies to include more than just language and literature is one of the major trends in the field, and has made translation studies one of the most attractive and promising fields of contemporary academic research. The paper focuses on how literary criticism can be critiqued by translation.

**Keywords:** Literary Criticism, Translation, Linguistics, Feminism, Deconstruction

### Introduction

To assert that translation offers a veritable vortex of challenges and future directions would be stating the obvious. However, it is always necessary to revisit our well-entrenched ideas and critique them from time to time. Especially, when the question is of translation from regional languages into English, the way we approach our translation will prove to be decisive. A number of prominent cultural critics, philosophers, and art theorists including Itamar Even-Zohar, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Umberto Eco, Gayatri Spivak, and Tejaswini Niranjana have shown interest in translation, and have all made unique and insightful contributions to the field. At the same time a number of prominent translation theorists, including James Holmes, Susan Bassnett, Andre Lefevere, Lawrence Venuti, and Theo Hermans, have each emphasized in

various ways that translation is not merely a transfer of information from one language to another. These scholars have all escaped the relatively narrow focus of traditional translation studies, which limited itself to the transformation of one language into another, and have worked together to survey and research translation on a broader level, with an emphasis on its role in intercultural exchange and comparative culture. For most of its long history, translation research has focused on a few issues related to linguistic transfer, such as translation techniques, translation strategies, translation standards, and translators' styles, and on slightly broader questions regarding the possibility of translation, or what translation scholars refer to as translatability. However, in the past few decades translation scholars have no longer limited themselves to these questions, and have begun taking a wide variety of different approaches to translation research. In addition to linguistics, literature, and foreign language education, researchers are now borrowing from a variety of other contemporary theories including literary hermeneutics, reception aesthetics, feminism, deconstruction, and postcolonialism. The broadening of translation studies to include more than just language and literature is one of the major trends in the field, and has made translation studies one of the most attractive and promising fields of contemporary academic research.

Translation assumes a more serious character when it is critical texts that one has to translate, because it differs considerably from translating literary texts. Moreover, the significance of translation of critical texts requires to be underscored. The challenges and opportunities translation of critical texts by a critic like Suresh Joshi presents have always remained understated. In terms of challenges, the critical thought rooted in the tradition of its own (e. g. Gujarati, in this case) also experiences the encounter with other traditions and imbibes ideas from them. Hence, it is imperative on the part of a translator to be conversant with the critical thought of not only one language from which he wishes to translate but also the other traditions which influenced it. A translation such as one from Gujarati or any Indian language for that matter into English will also proffer various opportunities as regards widening the horizons of critical thought by contributing to the existing reservoir of critical knowledge. A translator requires a unique blend of abilities to focus on the translation of critical texts, the difficulties inherent in them, and strategies for overcoming them.

The deconstructionist views on translation have carried constructs of translation one step further. Venuti, the contemporary American translation theorist, pointed out that, "The meaning of a piece of work is diversified. A translation only stabilizes one meaning of the work for the time being. Besides, the stabilization (or translation) of the meaning is shaped on the basis of different cultural hypotheses and choices of interpretation, and is restricted by specific social situation and different historical ages. Meaning is a kind of diversified and uncertain relation, rather than a stable and consistent whole." Hence, translation of Suresh Joshi's critical essays into would mean a few things in terms of translation as an exercise. Firstly, it takes the Gujarati literary criticism beyond the linguistic barriers and thus, enables its fresh critique by the wider mass of critics and readers across the globe. So far, Suresh Joshi had remained confined to an insulated world of Gujarati criticism, but now his writings on Gujarati criticism which represent Gujarati criticism, once translated, can be analysed by critics of different critical traditions. What that means in effect is that his place as a critic in the Indian critical tradition in general and the Gujarati critical tradition in particular would be re-examined. Translation facilitates this.

Secondly, his writings contain his analyses of the then schools of Western literary theory and criticism and which he offered in the light of the literary-critical scenario in Gujarat. Now it means that he had critiqued the Western literary criticism a great deal and written extensively on

the implication and application of the same on Gujarati literary and critical tendencies. His writings are a site of arguments, upholding and contesting various literary theories and critical opinions.

Suresh Joshi's writings are a coded world which is made of these various theories and terms from the Western and Indian traditions. The knowledge of the theories is one thing and to read their critique in Suresh Joshi's writings is altogether another thing as they are so well-blended in his ideas that he contextualises and indigenises them when he writes. Besides, he writes in response to many other things happening around him on the Gujarati literary and critical scene, so his writings have to be read in the context of the ambience in which he was responding to the creative and critical follies of his times. He believed that the function of criticism was to create an intellectual climate in which different kinds of literature should flourish and his writings always stressed the idea of creating such a climate. For example in his essay, 'Vidyapith ma Sahitya nu Shikshan'(Teaching Literature at University), he explained how literature teaching was turning into a mindless ritual at the university and the university as a space for intellectual questioning and critiquing had lost its relevance and validity. Hence, he asserts that if literary criticism and reading of literature have to survive, university as a system, teaching as a profession will have to undergo some drastic changes.

If the nature and functions of literature is the mainstay of criticism, Suresh Joshi explores its intellectual space thoroughly. He accomplishes this with the help of a wide variety of theories. He clamours against those who wish to use art for purposes other than literary. For example, he criticises those poets who get carried away by the zeal of social change through literature. He time and again comes to the discussion on the fundamental questions like, 'Why do we write literature?' in his opinion, literature stands for itself, not for any ideology or any campaign. A similar aspect to some writers' writing is that they try to make it palatable to the masses for popularity. In his view writers, should toil hard to transform what they wish to present into a form which does not allow easy relish.

Suresh Joshi's critical writings are an exposition of the nature, function and form of literature which are the most ancient and yet unarguably the most relevant concerns of all the times. Gujarati literary scenario and the critical theories were in dire need of a dose of new ideas and new ways of reading, writing and perceiving literature and criticism. Suresh Joshi's critical texts should be read as the critique of the literary practices of his times and should be read for anybody who wishes to trace the history of Gujarati literature and criticism. These critical essays provide us with an opportunity to enter into a dialogue with the best which was being thought and discussed in the West at that time because what he accomplishes in them is that he takes up a fundamental critical concern and examines it through various theories at his disposal from the West and critiques the literary and critical scenario of his times and also critiques the theory he uses, if need be. 'Pratikrachana' (Symbol-forming) is an extensive discussion on the use of symbols. He also opines that the poet should take language beyond the beaten paths and keep exploring new horizons. He takes recourse to examples from Vishnuprasad Trivedi to Baudelaire and expounds the significance of using symbols for conveying a certain sense.

In 'Kinchit'(A Bit), Suresh Joshi takes back to the fundamental critical concerns by asking the question, 'what is the objective of a work of art?' It is not that it is an entirely new question to ask. He emphasises that whenever we ask these basic issues and face it with an open mind, the nature and import of the question crystallize. He points out the age old response readers give after reading a story; the reader or the critic asks a question: what does the author want to say through this story? He gives his own example and opines that he himself is never in

a position to say what he wants to say through his stories. He goes on to give an example of a chair and how who sits on the chair makes the whole difference to our perception of the image of a person sitting on the chair. Then he relates it to Van Gogh's painting 'Yellow Chair' and recalls the response Paul Gauguin had given about it, saying, 'No one ever painted a chair like that before!'

In 'Gujarati Bhasha Sahitya' (Literature in Gujarati Language), he gives his characteristic perspective on the relationship of Gujarati with Sanskrit and Gujarati literature in general. This essay seeks to give his insights on the legendary poets and writers like Narmad, Kant, Manilal etc. He also discusses the influence of English and the influence of Gandhiji and Ravindranath Tagore on the Gujarati literature. This essay is significant because he gives us the whole trajectory of Gujarati literature and criticism in Gujarat in one essay. He traces the influence of Sanskrit in the themes and language of early Gujarati writers. He also brings to the fore how the influence of English is also noticeable in Gujarati writers and poets. He rounds it off with a word on the state of criticism in Gujarat by pointing out that critics have yet to develop the critical acumen required in the face of the challenges which face us.

'Kavita no Prachar' (Expanse of Poetry) opens with a reference to a 'Read Poetry' campaign in Calcutta. He states that the idea of propaganda for reading poetry might sound ridiculous at first but it brings to the fore that tragic reality that poetry and literature are in dire need of some desperate measures in a world which is hell bent on chasing materialistic goals. He quotes a number of critics, poets and thinkers like Herbert Read, Erich Heller, and Vladimir Wield to name a few, to bring out the state of poetry in the context of his times.

Suresh Joshi has also written an essay on Sartre entitled 'Sartre: Aaj na Sandarbhma' (Sartre: In Today's Context). Suresh Joshi discusses Sartre in the context of the decay of values and ideas which we once held high and the emergence of a new reality of our lives, science. He discusses the relevance or the lack of any great thinker in times when today's thinker is one who writes the editorial of a newspaper and critiques the phenomena of his times as philosophers used to do. He raises a valid question as to if this erosion or trivialisation of philosophy continues, shall we have a tradition of philosophy in future or will it become extinct? He also criticizes the tendency to stay afloat in the intellectual space by clinging on the latest trend in thinking and goes on to say that existentialism came in Gujarati literary and critical stratosphere much as the new intellectual fetish. This essay is a foray into the changing paradigms of life and hence of philosophy, the role of thinkers like Sartre and the relevance of the philosophy in the world.

'Sarjak, Sarjan ane Vivechan' (Writer, Writing and Criticism) is detailed analysis of the nature and functions of all three: writer, literature, and criticism. Suresh Joshi brings to the fore the way a work of art has always been perceived as 'intentional' product of the artist. He recalls that Roman Ingarden had presented the idea in a philosophers' meet in 1956 that while we lay down the characteristics of aesthetics, it should all begin with the 'encounter' between the artist and the work of art. But the basic premise of the essay is that it rests on the artist's creative talents as to how he gives form to the experience. It is Formalist statement on how an artefact is constructed.

While 'Sanketvigyan ni Saiddhantik Bhumika' (Theoretical Foundation of Semiology) expounds, as the title suggests, the basic theoretical position of Semiology, 'Sanket Vigyan' is a full-fledged foray into Semiology. Suresh Joshi goes on to expound for us what the basic premises and constructs of Semiology are. He discusses the territories which Semiology should focus on and the way a number of braches can be studied with Semiological approach. 'Navya

Vivechan vishe Thodu' (A Bit on New Criticism) is an expository essay on how New Criticism emerged and developed as a school of literary criticism. He takes the opportunity to discuss the ramifications of oversight and false notions on the part of criticism. On the other hand, he also emphasises that one should also know the tradition in totality and unless that happens, he would question the understanding of that individual. In all, this essay traces the evolution of New Criticism and discusses its relevance in the then literary context.

'Bhasha Vigyan ane Sahitya Vivechan' scrutinizes the way we approach linguistics and literary criticism. The title instantaneously reminds us of Roman Jakobson's 'Poetics and Linguistics'. 'Arvachinta ane Anuarvachinta' is a foray into Modernism and Post Modernism and the relationship of the two. In the course of this discussion, he explores all the Modern and Post Modern schools of literary theory and criticism. He refers a great deal to the existing work on the two and the driving force of the same. This essay brings to the fore the Suresh Joshi who is extremely well read into the Western literary theory and criticism and concerns himself extensively on the implications of the same on Gujarati literature.

Translating of Suresh Joshi's critical essays can, thus, merely an endeavour to understand the world in which Suresh Joshi lived and thought. It is also an exercise to revisit some of the Western constructs and re-examine their validity or relevance to our context in times when theory seems to rule our academic and intellectual existence. His writings offer a space to contemplate upon a phase of literature and criticism in Gujarat when new ideas were most desperately needed to be ushered in. Translation, hence, becomes a very enriching site for the questioning and re-examining our own ideas as well.

### Conclusion

In summation, one can derive a few ideas regarding translation and its relationship with literary criticism. Firstly, translating critical texts leads the march back to the history of literary theory and criticism because we have to trace the origin of the idea to where it all began, be it, Plato or Derrida. In the light of a translation of a critical text by a critic like Suresh Joshi, this means a re-reading of and re-analyzing the literary criticism as it was and as it exists at this juncture. It also means that we shall be exploring the way the ideas which originated in the West and reached the various parts of the rest of the world, in this case Gujarat, and the way they were subjected to intense scrutiny as against their eulogistic and uncritical acceptance by many of us. In view of different critical traditions lesser known to the English speaking world, translation of critical texts of can, thus, help us critique literary criticism of yore and the up-to-the-minute gyrations of theory in a world in which technology proliferates knowledge at the speed of light.

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