

REFASHIONING *RAAG DARBARI* IN ENGLISH

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After significant advancements in the discipline of Translation studies, it is now widely believed that translation is not a mechanical task. It is a tedious process where the translator bears immense responsibility of doing justice to the original text. There are many theories that govern the practices of translation. Some theorists rate it as a necessary task whereas many discard it by referring to it merely as a secondary task. There are many arguments regarding gain and loss in the process of translation. In this paper, there is an attempt to examine the English translation of Shrilal Shukla's *Raag Darbari* by Gillian Wright through the theories put forward by Walter Benjamin and Gadamer.

Raag Darbari was published in Hindi to great acclaim in the year 1968 and since then it has been translated into more than fifteen languages. The novel is a tale of a fictional village Shivpalganj situated in the district of Rae Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh during the 1950s. Through the story of the village, this novel highlights the degradation of values in post-independent India. The author unlike other Hindi novelists does not talk about the misery in villages or adopt a sympathetic tone but he uses a satirical tone to highlight rampant corruption in politics, education system and bureaucracy of the village. The novel is rich in imagery that takes its readers on a joy ride to the village of Shivpalganj. It is written in a humorous style which is further enriched by the use of regional dialects and idioms. Owing to all these factors it becomes a difficult novel for any translator and particularly more difficult for a translator who may not be entirely conversant with the local North Indian milieu and ethos. Gillian Wright, a British origin researcher, journalist, radio producer and translator who spent a significant amount of time in India, has translated the text.

Most of the difficulties in translating *Raag Darbari* into English from Hindi emerge because of the differences between the linguistic structure of both the languages and their cultural differences as well. However, some difficulties are also because of the complex writing style of Shrilal Shukla. *Raag Darbari* is particularly admired for a delightful satirical mode of narration. To convey the same, the author uses colloquial Anglicized Hindi, Awadhi dialect and also sometimes he prefers using Sanskrit origin Hindi words that are difficult to understand even for a modern Hindi reader too. In the original text Shrilal Shukla himself paraphrased Awadhi idioms and poems into Hindi so that the reader can understand them properly. Before comparing the

novel and its English translation, there is a brief discussion on what Benjamin and Gadamer have to say about translation and translator.

Walter Benjamin in “The Task of the Translator” scrutinizes some of the traditional theories towards translation that tend to restrict it to the communication of meanings and intentions of the original text. He observes that translatability is an elemental quality of certain texts which allows the scope of its translation. He writes, “Translatability is an essential quality of certain works, which is not to say that it is essential that they be translated; it means rather that a specific significance inherent in the original manifests itself in its translatability” (71). This is because of the virtue of this translatability that an original work is closer to translation. For him translation is not about providing a new version of the text or conveying some message, it is the search of a “pure language”. He talks about how two different languages supplement each other in translation to achieve a higher and purer language. The task of a translator is not to render one language into another but to deepen and expand the original language by means of the foreign one. He argues that translation should not try to transfer meaning but rather translate as close to the original as it can. Translation for him is an art form that does not intend to serve its readers for accuracy of meaning. He in fact discards the importance of the reader of the translated text. He believes that “it ‘tells’ very little to those who understand it” (69).

Gadamer finds translation an act of interpretation. He believes that the translator’s task of recreating is similar to that of hermeneutic task that the text presents and it differs only in degree with one another. Translation for him is an act of highlighting and distancing too. He says that translation of a text is re-creation of the text according to what translator understands it. Translation therefore becomes an act of interpretation and not simply reproduction. He argues that in translation it is necessary to highlight the feature of original that is important to us, and this is done by suppressing other features. He says that however faithful the translation may be, it can never overcome the gulf between the original and the translation. He says, “Where a translation is necessary, the gap between the spirit of the original words and that of their reproduction must be taken into account. It is a gap that can never be closed” (386). He also believes unlike Benjamin that “the translator must translate the meaning to be understood into the context in which the other speaker lives” (386).

Let’s examine Wright’s translation in light of the fact whether she has considered the readers and their cultural and linguistic context or not. Just like Gadamer’s theory, which insists on the importance of the reader, Gillain Wright has kept in mind the linguistic and social contexts of her reader while translating *Raag Darbari*. She adheres to the fact that the language of the translated novel is also determined by its reader which Walter Benjamin believed otherwise. She prepares the reader by giving them the basic understanding of the social set up of the novel through an appendix and a well explained introduction. She explains many key terms like the title ‘Raag Darbari’ as “one of the most difficult ragas of Indian classical music”, and also names of the characters such as Vaidyaji as “Brahmin ayurvedic doctor”. She also gives an account of the caste systems, a common discriminatory practice in Indian villages to understand layers of prevalent hierarchy, to explain the dominance of Brahmins and Thakurs. In the Appendix, Wright has mentioned some cultural contextual words, mythical terms along with the description of some ancient Indian texts that Shrilal Shukla mentions in the novel. Apart from the social context of the reader, the translator has carefully considered the linguistic difference as well. She has tried to adhere to words that could not jeopardize the understanding of the novel for English readers. For example, in the following passages:

Original- Dono naslo ke sahib- gore ya kaale- dehaaton mein jab daure par jaate jaate toh wahin rukte the (322)

Translation- Sahibs of both races- white and brown- would stay there when on tour. (329)

We can see how Wright has carefully replaced the word black with brown. In Indian context ‘Gore’ means the British officer and ‘Kaale’ means the Indian officers. But ‘Kaale’ if translated as black would refer to completely different socio-cultural set up. So to avoid such misunderstanding, Wright has used brown.

In many instances she has also failed to convey the exact social context to her readers.

For example:

Original- Do teen shuruati vaakyon tak toh Gayadin ki samajh mein kuch nahi aaya, par uske baad hi unhone padha, “mujhko apne galle(arthat gale) laga lo, O mere Humrahi.(164)

Translation- For the first two or three sentences he hadn’t been able to understand what it was about, but then his sister had read, ‘Embrace me, come, my fellow wayfarer!’(164)

Now here she has translated the word ‘Humrahi’ as wayfarer or companion of the road which reduces the meaning of Humrahi. There are many words which can be understood by a Hindi speaker but cannot be explained in English. For such words she has written the exact syntactical words. Words like ‘tangri’ for flush/ flesh, ‘tirrail’ for tray etc. There is an interesting passage at the beginning of chapter twenty-five in the novel where a love letter is composed through various Bollywood chartbusters of that time but in translation it sounds elusive. Wright though mentions in the translation that the love letter is concocted from the lyrics of Hindi films songs but still it clearly fails to capture the amusing tone which original text must have produced to its readers.

Gillian Wright has also carefully edited according to her understanding, what was unimportant for her English readers by excluding unnecessary lines from the novel. Most of the passages are even chopped by the publisher, Penguin Books India to keep the price below a certain psychological barrier. But still in various passages she has omitted certain lines which might be untranslatable or which she considered irrelevant for her readers. For example,

Original- Woh sab mele me ja rahin thi. Bhartiya naritva is samay fanfanakar ke bahar aa gaya tha. Woh sab badi tezi se aage badh rahi thin, muh par na ghunghat tha na lagaam thi (110)

Translation-They were all going to this fair. They were proceeding briskly, no veils on their faces or reins on their tongues (112)

There are other instances as well where Wright could have improvised. She used old English as a substitute for the principal’s dialogue in Awadhi dialect. It could have been written in English and mentioned that Principal spoke in Awadhi. She has tried to translate many regional short poems as well in her translation which were explained by Shukla in Hindi in the the original text.

For instance, we can observe in the following example:

Original- Ki purus bali nahin hot hai, Ki samay hot balwan
Ki bhullan lutin gopika, ki wahi arjun wahi baan.

Translation-There is no mightiness in man,
Time it is that’s strong
The forest men stole the milkmaids,
And the once great Arjun looked on.

Here, she has tried to capture the meaning but the lyrical tone of the original lines has evaporated. In fact, Arjun and milkmaids are terms which can be understood in a better way by an Indian reader in Hindi. However, her effort deserves appreciation.

Her position as a translator can be understood if we try to understand what Gadamer said for a translator. Gadamer believed that translation is an act of interpretation. The translator reads a text, understands it and in the translation, explains it. Therefore, Gillian Wright here does the work of translator as well as interpreter. She must have first understood the text and then interpreted it. Any interpretation is bound to be conditioned by the knowledge of social and cultural ideas and its experiences. So such flaws are liable to happen. Gadamer himself believed that no translation can be perfect. Benjamin in his essay talks about things which was not possible for Gillian Wright to employ in her translation. However, if there exists a 'pure language' then those temporal opening must have been considered by her. Benjamin argued that one should translate as close to original text without caring for the accuracy of meaning. Benjamin also talked about 'source language' and 'target language' that how both of them supplement each other. For that matter we can observe that through the translation of *Raag Darbari* many readers must have become acquainted with some regional Hindi words. Benjamin talks about importance of intention while translating a word. A translator should take care of the intention while rendering meanings to words. This is what we saw in the example of 'gore' and 'kaale' where 'kaale' becomes brown so that intended effect could be gained.

However, it should be kept in mind that Wright met Shrilal Shukla and cleared her confusions which is a luxury for a translator. Benjamin talks about translation of those works where there is a gap between life spans of the author and the translator. Moreover, Benjamin hinted that a single sign can have many signifiers so there is similarity in difference. In the same way Gadamer also said that interpretation and understanding is the "concretion of historically effected consciousness" (391). However here both author and translator belong to contemporary time. Gillian Wright's translation has succeeded in the manner that it expanded the afterlife of novel *Raag Darbari*. Her translation made it possible for the novel to reach more number of readers which obviously added to the popularity of the original author. This English translation is faithful to the original to a large extent, however certain deficiencies can be visible to a bi lingual reader who has read the Hindi original. Gadamer also believed that translation is a 're creation' of the original text and Gillian Wright has successfully accomplished it.

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