



Issues in the translation of poetry with special reference to Dilip Chitre's *Shesha*

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ABSTRACT:

Translation of poetry is a delicate and complex craft that calls for a profound comprehension and appreciation of the source material in addition to language fluency. Translators have the difficult challenge of communicating the intricacies and feelings of their language to a new audience, just as poets capture these nuances and emotions. A bilingual poet who is aware of this likes to translate his own poems. We have many notable examples of this in the literatures of the world. In the history of Indian poetry in English spanning over two hundred years the names of very few bilingual poets are inevitably mentioned. Dilip Chitre has created very adorable position in this canon. Therefore, Chitre's Marathi- English compositions should be viewed in the context of vast historical context of bilingualism in literature. It is not sufficient to note that Chitre is a bilingual poet because Chitre is a painter and has worked in film industry too. He has also ventured into different fields of creativity like short stories, literary essays and thought provoking prose, and plays. It would also be possible to say that while translating, Chitre writes in a language other than Marathi and English. His *Shesha* (2008) is a translation of his own Marathi poems and it can be viewed as the representation of his poetic craft and potential as a translator; the two roles he is playing over the last fifty years of his writing career. This paper tries to catch some major issues among many the poet faces while translating his own poems from English into Marathi.

Key Words: Translation, bilingual, poetic features, untranslatable, colours.

Introduction:

There are many definitions of poetry throughout the ages agreed on the term that it is one of the most mellifluous linguistic devices man has ever created. As the subject matter of this



paper is related with the translation, a structural transformation of poetry, it is relevant to consider the following interpretation of poetry for convenience: Poetry is “writing that formulates a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience in language chosen and arranged to create a specific emotional response through meaning, sound, and rhythm.” (Merriam Webster)

General Difficulties in the Translation of Poetry: It is now established that poetry's characteristic traits make translation more challenging. Poetry differs from other literary forms in that it is always governed by certain rigorous standards about form, rhyme, meter, and rhythm. The prosodic elements of poetry in one language are exceedingly difficult to adequately translate into other languages that have little in common since different languages typically have quite varied rhythms, rhymes, and tones. The most challenging aspect of translating poetry is the poetic spirit or flavor, which is closely related to linguistic characteristics and profoundly ingrained in the language. Every language has a distinct flavor that changes as it is translated into another language, as well as the spirit of the original lost. The biggest challenge, however, arises from the challenge of determining the cultural equivalency between languages due to the stark contrasts in cultural differences across different countries. These differences include variations in local environments, social customs, cultural backgrounds, aesthetics, history, and religion, among other things. If speakers of another language are unaware of the full cultural background, these gaps in culture will make it impossible for them to form any associations in their thoughts, which will undoubtedly make it difficult to complete a good and satisfactory translation.

But just as Willis Barnstone (1993) pointed out, “Although it is impossible to reproduce the same sound and meaning in intra- and inter-lingual translation, I think what is the most interesting to translate and most susceptible of success is the impossible or, even better, the untranslatable” (p. 49). It is true that the linguistic features, poetic features and spirit and cultural connotation connected with one language are extremely difficult to be conveyed in the poetry translation from one language into another exactly, while in practice, what appears to be on the surface difficult offers the best possibilities of an interesting success and the joy and success only go to translators with exceptional ability and painstaking effort.

Chitre as a Bilingual Poet and Translator: Chitre admitted that his poetry is “... rooted in multiple artistic traditions and influenced by things beyond my native culture.” (p.4) Reflections



of these multicultural roots are easily seen in his English as well as Marathi poems. His being plurilingual poses some difficulties in understanding of the employment of some specific poetic devices for both the English as well as Marathi readers. His strong contention is that “As a bilingual poet I am often asked in which language my poems come to me. Truthful answer to this question is that my Marathi poems come to me in Marathi and English poems come to me in English.” (p.4) It is, however, debatable under the premises of theory and practice of translation. His plurilingual nourishment undoubtedly helps him to proclaim himself as a natural translator. Chitre claims in the Foreword to *Shesha* (2008) that many of these translations retain their original Marathi aura as well as structural, lexical, and syntactical peculiarities. This summarizes his potential as the translator and his knowing that he has been labeled obscure, eccentric, unusual and esoteric by some critics add to his uniqueness as a bilingual poet and translator of his own poetry. Chitre’s Marathi poetry set herself free from the unconventional literary limitation of the modern style of Mardhekar. His is the individual style of poetic composition that contributed immensely to Marathi poetry in general. Although his poetry is loaded with the cultural references to Maharashtra like Dnyaneshwar and Tukaram, the Indian and Western ideologies emerged outside Maharashtra have also been assimilated in it. This poet is the best example of the influence of two hundred years encounter and hybridization of English and Marathi. Chitre assimilated the Western literature and style but never forgot his native poetic tradition.

Therefore, Chitre's Marathi- English compositions should be viewed in the context of vast historical context of bilingualism in literature. If we are aware of this historical context, we could never forget that Chitre belongs to a native tradition as well as is genuinely modern poet and his Marathi and English poetry is inseparable from each other. Moreover, limitations in understanding his poetry causing from reading within the context of Marathi can also be avoided. It is not sufficient to note that Chitre is a bilingual poet for he is a painter and has worked in film industry too. He has also ventured into different fields of creativity like short stories, literary essays and thought provoking prose, and plays. It would also be possible to say that while translating Chitre writes in a language other than Marathi and English.



Translation as a language or dialect: Translating is thought to include creating a previously unheard-of linguistic canvas and texture in the target language. The language of translation and the dialect produced by translation are clearly distinguished in BhalchandraNemade's translation theory. Chitre's translated works represent a new language that is constantly evolving at the border of Marathi and English, if we accept the principle that over time the dialect created by translation finds a place in the main stream of language of translation and adds new dimensions to the meaning in the main stream. This new topography of language has been referred to by Chitre as a bridge. In his English article on translation *Life on a Bridge*, he has explained the ethics, rules and principles of this new topography of language:

Even as an independent practicing poet, I live in the post-modern world transformed by translation. This is my predicament as a writer. I have to build a bridge within myself between India and Europe or else I become a fragmented person. (The Bombay Literary Review, 1989:I, p: 14)

Moreover, it contains the domestic references to Marathi family like the images of trees of drumsticks, Neem and Audumber planted due to Marathi culture, grandmother's tales, and the circles of mythological stories of two hundred years around the banyan tree. All these indigenous references keep surfacing in Chitre's English poems several times. On the contrary, in his Marathi poems the traditions of several countries including Greece, Rome, England, France, Russia, and South America are mentioned. Even some of the themes, which prevail only in English also appear in his poems. It makes clear that to state Chitre uses English for certain themes and Marathi for certain themes would be unrealistic.

Chitre brought innovations in form, imagery, style, structure and diction. The diction is akin to colloquial languages and rhythm. His poetry adhere to his own principles. He says, "But I was liberated because I created my own work on my own terms." (p.5) Chitre always viewed the writing and translation of poetry as part of a continuum. It is also assumed in such a criticism that there is a certain Marathi-content that can be expressed only in Marathi and English-content in English and therefore, by turning languages upside down language-specific content cannot be expressed. Chitre compels us to re-examine these principles and positions.



Shesha (2008) is a translation of his Marathi poems he published over the last fifty years. As a poet-translator of these poems, Chitre tried to reflect essence in terms of manner as well as matter of the original in English also. The following are some of the major issues in these translated poems:

- A) **Difficulty in Translating Linguistic Features:** In most cases, the difficulties in poetry translation are caused by the linguistic differences between the source language and the target language, which are obvious obstacles in poetry translation. Barnstone (1993) pointed out that because the words and grammar of each language differ from every other language, the transference of a poem from one language to another involves differing sound and prosody. And because there are no perfect word equivalents between languages, perfection in translation is inconceivable (p. 265). We find instances in the poems like *Rains* where the Marathi word like ऋतुगंधा has only translated literally as a ‘woman smelling of seasons’ which creates not adequate sense for the non-Marathi readers. In the poem *Flesh Tint* the Marathi word घाटीण has geographical regional context which is not reflected easily into English. ‘Woman from over Western Ghats’ needs more explanation for foreign readers. Barnstone (1993) revealed clearly that the linguistic differences, including semantic, phonic and syntactic ones, prevent “perfection in translation”. The explanation is really straightforward. When it comes to translation, the source and the target are never equal, can never be equal, and speech sounds and grammars from various languages rarely have the same characteristics. Meanings in different languages only partially overlap, never coincide. That is to say, pursuing precise lexical and syntactic equivalency in the target language is challenging. When Chitre says, “It is no easier for me to as a translator to handle my own source texts than to handle texts written by the vast variety of poets I have translated during the last fifty years.”, (p.4) he points indirectly to this issue. Translation has also brought with it special pleasures and problems, like inheriting a nuanced cultural landscape.
- B) **Economy of Language:** Literary critic Mark Flanagan describes poetry’s most definable characteristic as **the economy of language**—which is a fancy way of saying that poets *make every word count*. The translated versions in *Shesha* are exceptionally compact in size. Few lines containing fewer words is the recurrent structural pattern we find here. The poems like *Shesha*,



Sketch, Battle, Blue Afternoon, Leningrad, sans Mandelstam, April 1980, Rains and many other poems do not exceed 15 lines. Apt word in the apt place is the apparent arrangement we find in nearly every poem. They match their original Marathi poems in this. In the poems like *Kieve Ukraine April 1980, Battle* and other number of poems there are not more than seven lines. The same length has been maintained in translation too.

- C) **Handling of the untranslatable:** It is the translator's responsibility to capture the subtleties, titles, evocative, symbolic, rhythmic, and unexpressed elements. Translations of some codes, symbols, and technical words are not possible. Only transliteration is necessary in these circumstances. Since the poet in this translated poem occasionally employs conversational language and the conversational method, the translator likewise does not adhere strictly to rhyme while translating from the source language into the target language. The poems like *Determined to Tell Lies* are pure pieces of conversation. In some cases, there are words that have no literal translation to another language. The Marathi words like *Ashadh, Pangara* remain the same in translation. It can be said that though there is great measure of untranslatable content in original Marathi poems, Chitre tried to translate the maximum either by finding easily recognizable English equivalents or through literal translation. For instance, in *Leningrad, sans Mandelstam, April 1980*, the phrase *poet* has been translated as **socialism** to be suitable historically:

Looking at the grand buildings on either side,

Realising that these monuments had no poet in mind.

दुतर्फांभ्याआहेतराजेशाहीइमारती

ह्याइमारतींनासमाजवादअ भप्रेतनव्हताचकधी

D) **Word Pictures and Colours:** It is the art of using words in a way that creates an illusion for the senses—the art of using words to accomplish what a painter uses colors to accomplish. These qualities set poetry apart from other literary forms and contribute to the challenges associated with translating a poem between languages. It is a distinctive feature of Dilip Chitre's poetry that his poems are word pictures. In many poems, we find a picture, a moment is caught by the poet with apt words. The poems like *On the Scarlet red Pangara tree, Sketch* and other are pure word pictures that go very near to Japanese Haiku. Very few poems in *Sheshaare* devoid of



expressions related with specific colours and it seems that the sense Chitre wants to transfer to the readers is through colours. The poems like *Flesh Tint*, *The Snowstorms of the Ice's Fragrance*, *Like Sparrows from Wild*, *They tell me your colour is blue* are nothing but colours in place of words.

Conclusion:

It is difficult to review all the issues in the translation by Chitre here. In short, like every self-translated text, *Shesha* is also an encounter with other-in-oneself for Chitre. Author-translator never approaches the text as reader-interpreter. In this case the act of translation becomes reading and/or translating his/her own self at a particular point of time and space. *Shesha* can be studied with this broader perspective.

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