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Translation; Theory and Praxis: Reading Qurratulain Hyder's *Aag ka Darya* to *River of Fire*

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Abstract:

The present paper tries to show that translation, a creative rewriting of an existed text is mainly based on reading of a source text. Reading plays a major role in the process of translation. A translator's critical or different reading and perception of a text becomes a major factor in translating a text in a different manner and becomes one of the main causes of various translations of a text.

This paper basically focuses on how a translator, who is none other than but a reader, during her act of reading, can be different in understanding the author or the text too. How her act of reading and ideology reflects in her translated work which is important to see here. Thus this paper shows translator as a reader and translation as mere reading. In order to do so, it takes the examples from the famous Urdu novel *Aag ka Darya* (1959) which is transcreated as *River of Fire* (1999) by the self-translator Qurratulain Hyder. However, it does not restrict itself to one author's work the paper also give various other examples from other texts too. Further, it tries to look at the argument through the frame work of Wolfgang Iser's work as well as on the Roland Barthes famous work "Death of the Author" (1968).

Keywords: translation, reading, transcreation, reader, author, source text, target text.

Reading:

A text that is written with some intention and purpose contains multiple layers of information, ideas and meanings. It is true that a text is written with some intentions but at the same time, it is also a fact that two people cannot understand a text in a same way. It depends upon their perception and experiences to understand a text. Since there is no such language exists which can exactly interpret a text and bring a unified single meaning of a text. Reading is like an

experience. Reading is such an act that stimulates a reader to generate meaning from a text like putting one's experiences and beliefs at test. The reader tries to fill in the gaps and draws conclusion using the clues given in a text. Terry Eagleton here explains the important role played by a reader in constructing meaning of a text following the Wolfgang Iser's expressions. He says that,

The text itself is really no more than a series of 'clues' to the reader, invitations to construct a piece of language into meaning. In the terminology of reception theory, the reader 'concretized black marks on a page, without this continuous active participation on the reader's part, there would be no literary work at all. (Eagleton 66)

For Iser reading is a dynamic process that keeps on change with time. It is a complex movement where a reader approaches to a text with his pre-notions through which he tries to assess text during his act of reading. However, with the passage of time in the process of reading a text the pre-notions undergo a change and construct a logical sense of a text. This happens only when the reader excludes some of his beliefs and includes some in response to some elements that later come in the process of reading a text. He tries to shift his perception to make a meaning out of a text. Terry Eagleton puts Wolfgang Iser's idea as follows

Wolfgang Iser's Reception theory is based on a liberal humanist ideology: a belief that in reading, we should be flexible and open-minded, prepared to put our beliefs into question and allow them to be transformed. (Eagleton 69)

For Iser, a reader should not approach a text with a rigid kind of mindset. He should be open to analyze a text in different possible ways that will give him a better understanding of himself. Iser has differentiated between implied readers who are supposed to respond to a text in a way; it is written. Later the actual reader comes who perceives the text based on his own personal experiences.

According to Roland Barthes, a text is not an object to evaluate or judge rather than that it is a well-organized body, which is held in a language. "The work can be held in the hand, the text in a language" (Barthes, *From Work to Text* 157). A text is experienced in reaction to the signs. The signs though help one to demonstrate it but it does not mean that it has accomplished

its final destination through one reader. A text is paradoxical. It is plural in nature but the plurality of a text lies in its exploration by different readers. It gives freedom to readers to interpret it variously. The purpose of different understanding or looking at a text through different perspective is that a text though has things that are identifiable by a reader but their combination is different in narrating them in a text.

A text is made of multiple writing, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is tane place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not , as was hitherto said, the author. (Barthes, *The Death of The Author* 148)

The representation of those things takes a reader along with his experiences to understand a text in a different way. Barthes says that a reader becomes weak when it comes to understand the imagination of an author. It does not mean that a reader is actually weak in his imagination or he is not familiar with the things presented in the text by the author. This is so because the author knows what actually he meant it to be in the text. This combination takes the reader to a different meaning of the text. However, a reader is the one who gives life and meaning to a text through his reading.

As said by Barthes “a texts” unity lies not in its origin but in its destination (Barthes, *Death of the Author* 148). A text is read the way a reader wants it to read. A reader is weak in comparison to the author’s imagination or superiority of his knowledge about the text. However, it is not necessary that his imagination should match with the author’s imagination. The author though is the owner of the text but he appears as a guest in the text sometimes. However, “The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author”. (Barthes, *Death of the Author* 148)

Iser gives freedom to a reader but asks him to approach a text with flexible mind so that he can change his perception if required during the process of reading. Iser talks about the influence of an author on the text. However, he leaves it up to a reader to respond to the situations and modify his thinking or imagination if required. Further, he says that a literary work should help a reader in critically analyzing his thoughts and bring deep consciousness in him. At one side, he is asking and arguing for the freedom of a reader and on the other hand, he is

providing rules for a reader to approach to a text by a reader. Here Iser in a way is trying to formulate a theory where a reader can approach to an author in a text.

Iser does not emphasize much on the being there of the author whereas Barthes opposes it strongly on the presence of the author and he says as long as the author is alive the reader cannot take birth. It restricts an understanding of a text. Barthes says "To give a text to an author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing". (Barthes, *The Death of the Author* 147). However, the two theorists come to terms and give importance to readers and they reject the need or importance of a writer's biography, historical background etc. They consider it unimportant.

A reader can seek whatever he wants from a text. Readers read a text with different mood and intention and depending upon their understanding, they generate meaning from a text. In generating meaning language plays an important role. Meaning of words can be changed depending up on the context it is said or written. Thus, a reader should refuse the author's presence and begin to negotiate with the language. In this task, a reader begins to play an endless game of importance. Therefore, a text remains open for various interpretations.

Language is also an important tool for communication to understand each other's feelings and emotions. Reading a text can be called in a way as a one-way communication because in this channel of communication, text is present and reader is also present but the author is absent to complete the communication channel. Instead of him, his text remains in the form of ideas to generate whatever meaning one can generate from it.

Therefore, a text remains open for all to think and take out various possible meanings from it. Thus, a text has many meanings irrespective of what the author wants to say. Whatever a reader perceives and says cannot be denied, because the intention of readers may vary and each reading of a text by a reader makes it different that is how it holds its separate individuality. Language and culture also play the role in understanding a text and the reader's perseverance of it makes a text different. Like any other reader, translator also reads a text in this way. He tries hard to get to know the text and bring meaning out of a text.

Role of a Translator:

A translator is considered as one who represses himself by keeping himself aside during the process of translation and wears the mask of an author and gives his voice to someone else's work (Quoted in Venuti: 2000, 07). He has a double job at hand to do. He finds himself in between source text and target text, first as a receiver of the source text and then producer of a target text. His first step in the process of translation is to read the source text. He holds a special position during this process of translation. He reads a source text to initiate the act of translation and has to keep in mind the target audience, the author's intention and the culture of both the languages.

A translator in fact is more or less considered as a mediator who helps the author in transcending the cultural and linguistic boundary. A translator, through a translated text presents a foreign society and culture to the target audience. Translator does a highly responsible task. He loses his identity for a while in the process of translation. However, his painstaking task does not gain him much reward (Venuti: 1992, 01). His work is just considered as a mechanical activity and not a creative one. His work is judged based on its fidelity to the source text and is labeled as good, bad, fluent and lucid and so on.

A translator familiarizes readers to another culture. He contributes to the field of literature and helps in developing a language and culture as well (Gentzler 118). He understands the need of the target readers and tries to overcome the differences and difficulties that he comes across during the process of translation. He tries to convey the intentions of the author. However, judgment of a translated text is based on its readability. The criterion for judgment is that it should be fluently readable by the target readers. The author's intentions should be reflected clearly in the target text. Then a translated text will be considered more or less as a successful translation. However, to remove all those differences and achieve the same affect in the target language as it had in the source language text is difficult. Venuti says,

Translation is the forcible replacement of the foreign text with a text that is intelligible to the translating-language reader. These differences can never be entirely removed, but they necessarily undergo a reduction and exclusion of

possibilities-and an exorbitant gain of other possibilities specific to the translating language (Venuti: 2000, 14).

If a translation becomes fluent and readable then the translation will not remain translation, but an expansion of a source text. A source text's expansion or a translated text is not read just for meaning. A translated text may also bring with it a few new stylistic devices and cultural changes in a target system. In some countries, translation is done in order to save country's weak literature from crisis. Translations are also done to help in carrying ideas and to enhance the vocabulary of a target language. (Gentzler 117)

Translation as an Act of Reading:

The process of translation begins with a thorough reading of a source text. Translator due to need and demand of his profession reads each word and sentence meticulously and cautiously. He adopts such a method where he tries to give importance even to a smallest detail without neglecting them. His reading is a process towards finding out the various possibilities of meanings.

A reader, through the process of reading goes into a new atmosphere and situations where it does not construct or give one definite meaning but possibilities of various meanings. Reading paves, the way to the uncertainties of word both in terms of isolated and in association with other words or sentences or paragraph or in the complete context of a work. Reading acts as a tool to find out the meaning. In this process, a reader is found between various situations where before reaching to the final meaning he needs to unravel his understanding of a text.

The same is true in the case with the translator's act of reading a text. A translator also responses to a text in the same manner as any other reader and generate meaning. No reader can bring or give final meaning to a work. Reading helps in understanding a text through questions in which one answer leads to another question. This is how a translator or reader understands or brings meaning to a text. Deborah Cook in his article Translation as a Reading comments on the translator's act of reading by saying that, "Translation is response to the reading that gives it life".

According to Deborah Cook, “Problems of translation are ultimately problems of reading and can only be properly formulated and solved when reading is understood”. Translator’s act of reading is a nonstop course of action where he tries or opens up new opportunities of connections or point of analysis or semantic links. The reproduction of meaning varies with each reader or a translator. Due to its meaning extracted from a source text, a translated text is always seen in comparison to a source text. There are lots of things which come in between the process of translation as discussed earlier, based on which it can be seen separately as an individual text too. However, it is always denied its individuality. It is called ‘good’ or ‘bad’ depending upon whether the translated text is faithful to its source text or not.

However, it does not mean that the text has arrived to its final meaning by the translator’s act of reading a source text. There cannot be any definite meaning of a text, so that is why a text is translated many times. There are many such examples of one text being translated into another language a number of times, one of being Rabindranath Tagore’s *Gora*. Rabindranath Tagore’s famous novel *Gora* was published as a book in 1910 in Bengali. A range of scholars later translated it in different times. The first translation of *Gora* was done in 1924. Macmillan & Co of London published it. From 2002 onwards Rupa & Co, New Delhi has been issuing the novel and affirms that W.W. Pearson has done it in 1924.

E. F. Dodd did the Second Translation in 1964. Sujit Mukherjee, a well-known critic, theorist, translator and Tagore scholar, published by Sahitya Academy in 1997, did the Third Translation of *Gora*. The Fourth Translation of the novel came in 2008. It has been in cooperation done by Mohit K. Roy and Rama Kundu, professors of English at the University of Burdwan, West Bengal. Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, published this translation. Radha Chakravarty has done the Fifth Translation of *Gora* in 2009, published from New Delhi by Penguin India.

Various translators have translated the text five times until now in different periods. This shows the various possibilities of interpretation that a single text can have in different times by different readers. It also shows their intentions of translating a text. Due to this, we can say that a text cannot achieve its final meaning. A reader can keep on playing with the language of a text and no one can deny the importance of each text because each text has its own identity that may bring different interpretations of a source text. On this, James Holmes comments,

...no translation of a poem is ever “the same as” or “equivalent” to its original...put five translators onto rendering even a syntactically straightforward, metrically unbound magically simple poem like Caul Sandberg's “Fog” into say Dutch. The chances that any two of the five translations will be identical are very slight indeed. Then set twenty-five other translators into turning the five Dutch versions back into English, five translators to a version. Again, the result will almost certainly be as many rendering, as there are translators. To call this equivalence is perverse (Quoted in Gentzler 74)

James Holmes explains how the process of translation begins and how the analysis of a text by a translator can differ. In fact, he has defied the notion of equivalence because equivalence is possible only when the ideas and thinking or perception of a translator matches with an author. But this is a rare phenomenon to be seen. A translator's critical reading of a text effects on his initial decisions made in the process of translation. Ideologies of readers or translators differ. No two persons hold the same ideas about anything may it be literary text. One can find the different ideologies in the two translated texts of Mirza Mohammed Hadi Ruswa's very famous Urdu novel *Umrao Jan Ada*. The two English translations of the text, first published by Kushwant Singh and Husaini in 1982 and the second translation came by David Mathews in 1996.

The Urdu novel has three main chapters. The first chapter of the novel begins with Ruswa's preface where he narrates to his readers, how he and Umrao Jan Ada incidentally met in Lucknow. The second chapter follows it where their daily evening time meeting, a casual gets together of *Mushaira* with their friends and Ruswa here secretly begins to writes the life story of Ada mentioned in it. The main story begins after all this detail narration is represented and where Umrao is given her biography by Ruswa to read.

Kushwant and Husaini's translated text gives the details of Ruswa and Ada's meeting in the preface of their translated text. But before the narration they narrate what the subsequent paragraph is going to talk about like “In the preface to the novel *Umrao Jan Ada*, Mirza Mohammed Hadi Ruswa recounts how he came to write the story of the courtesan of Lucknow in the following words” after this the narration begins in Ruswa's voice. Singh and Husaini in the

preface write that “we have also had to take the liberty to delete some passages inserting new lines to link the sentences and correcting a few minor details”.

Singh and Husaini have not only done some minor changes by deleting some parts but they have deleted the *Mushaira* part that is the base of the novel. Sukrita Paul Kumar in the introduction of the same translated text of Singh and Husaini that is reprinted in 1993 with his additional introduction comments on the importance of the *Mushaira* part. She puts it that “*Mushaira*’ introduces Umrao Jan Ada’s refined poetic taste, her poise and her ability to excel in the company of knowledgeable men. It is only after her grace and competence impresses everyone that they urge her to tell them the story of her life”. Sukrita Paul Kumar also mentions that Singh and Husaini feel that by deleting *Mushaira* from their text they have left an important part of the novel.

Mathews’s translated version maintained the voice of Ruswa and it has the *Mushaira* part. It has very simple and easy language but like Singh and Husaini, he has also merged chapters one into another in the same manner. The source text has total 25 chapters whereas these two versions have 15 chapters. It shows that for Husaini and Singh the story of Ada is more important than any other part of the novel. For them the continuity of the narration holds prominence. The two different translations and readers of the same text defined and presented the text in a different manner and it reflects their ideology about the same text.

From all the above discussions, it is clear that a text can generate various meaning depending upon the reader’s intentions and moods. It can be presented according to a translator’s different ideology and understanding of the source text. Their needs and intentions also decide the meaning of a text.

Translation brings into notice how a reading of a text can differs from one person to another person. How a reader’s intention defines a text variously in different period of time by various readers. Translator opens the door of various interpretations of a text even between two different language readers. The language and cultural difference bring a new readership and a new way of thinking and interpreting a text. It can be said that the methodologies used by a translator can be used as an example to read a text

The translator brings out the various possibilities of each word's meaning. He discovers different possible meanings of a text. A literary text, an imaginative creation of an author, gives different realities and ideas to a reader. Translator has to bring out the different possible meanings and from that, he has to choose the most suitable and possible meaning. His intentions are to describe what the author meant in a way and which is nearer to the author's intentions and meanings. Text allows innumerable meanings and interpretations that the author might have not thought about but the readers can give various interpretations to a text. In its different meaning lies its different representations and lies its separation of a target text and its individuality.

In the translation of *Aag Ka Darya* i.e. *River of Fire*, there are changes, which are due to change or the difference in the ideology and reading of the text by the translator who has translated the text after a long period. The translator has conveyed the cyclic nature of history and human beings. The basic theme of the novel, individual versus history, Indian culture/multiculturalism and mental agony of partition are portrayed in the same way as it is represented in *Aag Ka Darya*. The culture of Hindu-Muslim society has been shown by their relationship. However, the translator has represented the source text with many changes that are obvious from the beginning of the target text.

The notion that translation can be justified accurately is an old and out dated concept. Translation is a tool to understand each other's culture and come closer leaving the linguistic and geographical boundaries. It is to explain the other what we are, what we think, how different we are and how similar we are in terms of culture, language, and thinking.

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