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THE ROLE OF TRANSLATIONS IN SHAPING A GLOBAL IMAGE OF INDIA

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Abstract

The linguistic diversity of India has, like its rich culture, delayed its languages and literary traditions to a limited regional context as opposed to a global context. In recent years, translation has progressed from a means to preserve culture and text, to an active product in the construction of a rich narrative that can be recognized globally to representations of India. We explore the important role of translations as a vehicle for amplifying India's cultural diplomacy and enabling inclusive nation-building in India, as translations allow for marginalized voices to be heard, which becomes a political act, thus moving beyond written communication and show respect for cultural voices to challenge both colonial and contemporary narrative practices through inclusivity. By critically assessing translated texts (including literature, policies, and media), we also explore how translations from India have been a mediator for representing India's pluralism globally. The essential argument is that translations can not only mediate language issues but also can provide people the platform to begin to voice an alternative representation of India as a vibrant and complex country. In assessing these intersections of translation, communities, and global diversity, ultimately, we want to today assert partnerships in translation can foster new practices in translation that can enhance India's soft power as a culture. In essence, we argue that through the mediating process of translation and its accompanying community engagement is a pedagogical process of creating cross-cultural dialogue, challenging stereotypes, and working to position India - as a country - as a foremost cultural civilizer to enhance socio-cultural cohesion and equity in a diverse society.

Keywords: Translation Studies, Indian Literature, Community Participation, Inclusivity, Dalit Literature, Adivasi Voices, Gender and Literature, Multilingualism, Cultural Diplomacy, Global Perception of India, Subaltern Voices, Linguistic, Diversity, Postcolonial, Literature, Regional Languages, Cross-cultural Communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

India stands as a nation with exceptional language diversity because it has twenty-two recognized languages, together with thousands of dialects. Without translation, India's complex literary heritage, which spans many centuries and multiple traditions, would stay mostly hidden from global audiences. Through translation, the world can access narratives and cultures and philosophies that would otherwise remain confined to their original languages. It also shapes global perceptions of India.

The Vedas' initial translations into Persian and the recent Booker Prize awards for Hindi literature demonstrate how translation serves as both an access point to Indian diversity and a space where cultural power struggles take place. Through texts and voices that translators rendered into world languages, the global image of India emerged as a land of rich spirituality and philosophical debate and social conflict and creativity and humor. According to theorist Lawrence Venuti, translation functions beyond mere reproduction because it generates new values through cultural

rewriting (Venuti). The article investigates the past and present effects of translation works on India's foreign reputation, together with translation theory developments and the rapidly changing Indian literary environment's obstacles and prospects.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: TRANSLATION AS CULTURAL MEDIATION

Translation studies advanced substantially during the twenty-first century through their transition from focusing on source text fidelity to examining translation as an intercultural mediation process. According to Susan Bassnett, together with Lawrence Venuti and Gayatri Spivak, along with recent Indian theorists, translation exists as a process involving power dynamics and cultural and political elements. According to Bassnett, the Indian translation process functions as a cultural gatekeeper that decides which stories become globalized and determines the construction of national identities and the management of "otherness" (Bassnett; Prasad).

Lawrence Venuti's theory of translation involves both domestication and foreignization, which creates ethical problems for translators handling Indian texts. Translators must decide whether to adapt Indian texts for mainstream readers through domesticating cultural elements or maintain their original foreign quality by opposing cultural standardization (Venuti 6). The complex linguistic and cultural boundaries in Indian literature become particularly evident because the texts contain multiple narrators, regional dialects, and layered mythologies [1].

According to G.J.V. Prasad, translation in India operates as a creative process known as "trans-creation" that produces pluralized artifacts that diverge from the conventional source-target duality. The method of dialogue and negotiation between languages remains essential for both Indian language translations and global translations because it prioritizes transformation over purity or fidelity (Prasad; Girardin).

3. HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY: FROM ANCIENT EPICS TO DIGITAL TRANSLATION

3.1 Ancient and Medieval Case Studies

The process of translation in India existed before European colonialism and represents a fundamental aspect of its literary and religious heritage. Since the 2nd century BCE, Buddhist texts began their translation process from Pali and Sanskrit into Chinese and Tibetan and Southeast Asian languages, which established India as a spiritual and philosophical center (Nisha 184). During the Mughal period, the Persian translation of the Mahabharata and Ramayana through Abu'l-Fazl's "Razmnama" served as a purposeful political and cultural initiative that established the long-lasting framework of Indo-Persian cultural fusion. The initial translation projects projected India's diverse and harmonious nature to global audiences while creating the foundation for Indian cultural fusion as a national identity [1].

The process of translating works between different regions held equal importance. The movement of Bhakti and Sufi poetry through various languages, including Marathi abhangas, Punjabi Shabads, and Tamil hymns, created dialogues about devotion and justice throughout the subcontinent [3]. Throughout India, translation has served as a tool for canon formation by distributing regional masterpieces like the Telugu Andhra Mahabharatam to establish nationwide standards.

3.2 Colonial and Early Modern Dynamics

During the colonial period, translation activities expanded at an unprecedented rate. The British Orientalist scholars who wanted to establish their legitimacy through rule engaged in translating Sanskrit works into English and Persian histories (e.g., William Jones' Shakuntala and Charles Wilkins' Bhagavad Gita). Through strategic translation activities, Indian intellectuals introduced nationalist and reformist texts in English and vernacular languages to develop a cosmopolitan Indian modernity (Nisha 185).

Canonical writers such as Rabindranath Tagore, who translated *Gitanjali* to achieve the 1913 Nobel Prize, and early translators of Kalidasa and Premchand and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay employed translation for a foreign audience reach and the development of a "global Indian" voice (Maharana). Major Indian publishing houses, Sahitya Akademi and National Book Trust, along with translation grant institutions, were established during the post-independence period, which democratized Indian literature's global distribution [3].

3.3 Contemporary Translations: The 21st Century Landscape

Over the last few years, there has been a significant boom in the volume of translations of the literature of the Indian languages, with both the state and private actors being the drivers of this trend. The use of new digital tools, the awarding of prizes for translation, and the Indian literary festivals going global have been the primary factors behind this unprecedented visibility of the regional narratives. From 2020 onwards, over 100 works in Indian languages have been translated into English and published every year, many of which have gone on to become global bestsellers [2].

One cannot but acknowledge that Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand*, the translation of which was done by Daisy Rockwell, got the International Booker Prize 2022, a moment that could be called a turning point for Hindi and Indian literature all over the world. Besides those acclaimed, these are some of the notable ones: Perumal Murugan's *The Story of a Goat* (Tamil), Vivek Shanbhag's *Ghachar Ghochar* (Kannada), Ambai's *A Kitchen in the Corner of the House* (Tamil), and the Dalit memory *Karukku*, authored by Bama (Tamil, tr. Lakshmi Holmström). Reviews say that these books are exceptional in breaking down clichés and opening up new territories on the world literary map.

4. MECHANISMS OF SHAPING INDIA'S GLOBAL IMAGE

4.1 Cultural Representation, Reclamation, and Stereotype Negotiation

Translations have a big impact on the way the whole world perceives "India"; they not only communicate the corrected minimalistic representations but also supply the world council with insight. The novel of Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*, has been translated into 40 languages, by which means the author has introduced the readers all across the globe to the intricacies of Kerala caste and gender politics, while the novels of Perumal Murugan have been unfolding the country-rural dichotomies and dealing with the issue of social marginality without simplifying the poverty or spirituality [2].

Moreover, translations are indispensable for the Indian diasporic writers who are in the process of negotiating between their home culture and new identities. Jhumpa Lahiri, who currently writes and translates in Italian, can be seen as the figure of this transcultural path, while the literature of Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, and Anita Desai, which is very often translated into several languages, has not only widened the "global Indian" subject but also has allowed it to incorporate hybridity, migration, and memory.

4.2 Preservation of Marginalized and Indigenous Voices

One of the most impactful interventions of translation to the times has probably been its role in reviving the marginalized narratives—Dalit, tribal, LGBTQ+, and regional literary voices. The translation of Dalit autobiographies, for example, Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* (Hindi, tr. Arun Prabha Mukherjee) and Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* (Tamil), acquaints the world with the accounts of defiance and endurance that would have otherwise been overlooked (Girardin). Both Sahitya Akademi and independent presses like Zubaan Books have focused on translating tribal and minority languages. This effort has helped to diversify the literary canon.

4.3 Diplomatic and Cultural Soft Power

Translation also serves as a tool for charm and cultural diplomacy. With the help of Indian universities, Sahitya Akademi, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), and the embassy, translation projects have been launched. These projects aim to go beyond Indian literature by sharing it with the world and organizing festivals of translated

literature in other countries [1]. This is how the efforts help spread the image of India as a civilization that is diverse, self-assured, and in conversation with the rest of the world and also provide a balance to the ideas of politics through those of art and intellect.

5. THE RISE OF DIGITAL HUMANITIES AND AI-DRIVEN TRANSLATION

The digital era has turned translation practice upside down in India. The Bhashini Project of the Indian government, Microsoft Translator's Indic language bundle, and Project Anuvadini (by AI4Bharat) are some of the large-scale projects that rely on artificial intelligence to facilitate fast, scalable translation of regional literatures, thus making literacy more accessible. These platforms not only help in the digitization of old texts but also contribute to the revival of the languages that are on the verge of extinction and greatly extend the reach of Indian literature.

On the other hand, AI-powered translation still encounters several issues, linguistically and culturally, whereby the machine translation systems only provide simplified versions of the original texts that lack the nuances, idiomatic expressions, and contextual subtleties, which has prompted the human-AI collaboration as a solution to ensure that the cultural and literary values of the translations are maintained (Jayesh 624-29).

6. TRANSLATORS AS GLOBAL CULTURAL MEDIATORS

Translators have long been viewed as hidden players who had little or no influence on how the world perceived things, but now they are being acknowledged as one of the main factors shaping the global perceptions. By translating the ancient Tamil classics, A.K. Ramanujan brought the Dravidian poetics to the world; similarly, Arunava Sinha's Bengali-to-English translations have opened the same gate for prose fiction. Translations are now dealing with the challenge of reflecting the richness of polyglot India as more than just a set of clichés: their labor decides the metaphors, rhythms, and memories that become part of the global consciousness.

Over the last few years, the translators Daisy Rockwell, Jayasree Kalathil, J. Devika, and Lakshmi Holmström, among others, have been the recipients of several international and national awards, which has significantly changed their profile as creators themselves. The major awards for translation—the JCB Prize, International Booker, Sahitya Akademi Translation Award, etc.—are the places where the translator's role as a key interlocutor in the worldwide literary dialogue is most visibly staged. Such acknowledgements have also led to a wider recognition of translation as both a performance and a creative act (Venuti; Prasad).

7. TRANSLATION IN PRACTICE: 2020–2025—EXPANDED CASE STUDIES

7.1 Literary Milestones and Prize-Winning Works

Geetanjali Shree and Daisy Rockwell, *Tomb of Sand* (Hindi): International Booker Prize 2022, praised for subverting both European and Indian narrative expectations.

S. Hareesh, *Moustache* (Malayalam, tr. Jayasree Kalathil): Explores gender, caste, and myth; lauded as an example of “magic realism with local specificity.”

Perumal Murugan, *Estuary* (Tamil, tr. Nandini Krishnan): 2021—tackles family, modernity, and rural-urban migration, now in translation across Europe.

Vivek Shanbhag, *Ghachar Ghochar* (Kannada, tr. Srinath Perur): International bestseller; cited for its minimalist style and psychological depth [2].

Ambai, *A Kitchen in the Corner of the House* (Tamil, tr. Lakshmi Holmström): Celebrated for feminist themes and nuanced social analysis.

Bama, *Karukku* (Tamil, tr. Lakshmi Holmström): Landmark Dalit autobiography, taught globally.

Mahasweta Devi, *Mother of 1084* (Bengali, tr. Samik Bandyopadhyay): This work explores political violence and the experiences of women. A 2024 Scroll.in survey found 103 Indian language books published in English translation in one year. This shows significant diversification. Many of these books focus on urban life, environmental issues, sexual identity, technology culture, and migration. They move away from the mythic-epic templates that were once typical in Indian literature.

7.2 Initiatives: Festivals, Government Projects, and Digital Consortia

The Jaipur Literature Festival and satellite events regularly undertake translation projects engaging new voices from the Northeast region of India, such as Assam, Nagaland, Odisha, and Kashmir. They also use simultaneous translation apps to make these events accessible globally, thus setting a new standard for multicultural engagement [1].

Sahitya Akademi's Project on Tribal Literature directly commissions the translations from the most endangered tribal languages into English, French, and other global languages so that the world can have access to indigenous knowledge and ecological philosophies.

With a vision to become the world's largest open language database for Indian languages, “the Bhashini Project” has been started by the Indian government to cater to both AI and human translation needs—a move that positions India as the leader of the global linguistic soft power [2].

AI4Bharat's Anuvadini comes with the support of neural translation models that are tailored to the linguistic reality of India, and this is what made them outperform their global counterparts for Indian source material.

8. ETHICAL, POLITICAL, AND MARKET CHALLENGES

Despite all the technological wonders, the process of translation in India is still facing quite a few ethical and

8.1 Market complexities.

Market Bias and Canonization: One of the consequences of translation is the market bias of the translated works that often promote the already existing “major” languages or “award-winning” genres and, thus, overshadow the rest of the voices. For instance, a Western publisher might only be interested in a work that supports their preconceived ideas of India—mysticism, poverty, or caste.

Censorship and State Influence: Religious, caste, or gender issues are some of the sensitive political areas that lead to censorship or self-censorship, especially in the case of translated texts that release power (Maharana).

Translator Invisibility: The position of the translator is quite paradoxical, as despite the recent triumphs, they are still less recognized, have low pay, and have limited creative control. Quite a number of them do not have the freedom to do paratexts (introductions, glossaries) and are not very visible in major reviews and festivals.

AI and Literary Quality: Although AI eases the process of translation, it lowers the standards of the work and flattens the literary and cultural nuances, thus unintentionally simplifying India's plural literary ethos for the sake of convenience and speed [2]. There is a continuous argument about the impact of “machine readable” translations on the literary market.

8.2 Translation and Global Cultural Dialogue: Soft Power Realized

Translation in India remains complicated due to ethical and market issues, even though the technology has improved greatly.

Translation is not only a literary gesture but also a successful political and cultural influence. India, besides its stories, exports the ideals of pluralism, tolerance, and creativity as well. Apart from literary translation programs, government-promoted projects, and collaborations with UNESCO and international publishing houses, these are the means through which India raises its cultural capital and global prestige as a nation of storytellers and thinkers.

India's present "Neighbourhood First" and "Act East" policies have not only diplomatic power but also collaboration when they decide to translate Indian classics into leading Asian and African languages. By doing so they are building bridges for bilateral relations and opposing the global cultural influence of other countries (Nisha 185) [1]. Translations are a medium that diasporic communities use to keep their heritage and identity intact, which in turn makes the connections between India and the global South stronger.

9. FUTURE PROSPECTS: TRANSLATION, TECHNOLOGY, AND INTERCULTURAL EMPATHY

The next ten years will likely see more mixing of AI, digital study, and human skill in translation, showing India's spot as a hub of tech growth and book history. Working together in translation groups, better training, and more praise for translators, along with money from the government and private groups, will open up the book world more.

The job of translation in making India's world view is thus getting bigger, not smaller, in this century. As *Cadernos de Tradução's* 2025 issue says, the mix of many languages, digital study, and people from far places coming together is turning Indian translation studies into a place for world-class ways [1]. It is this ongoing give-and-take—between old ways and new, local and worldwide—that makes sure India's book future will be as rich and big as its past.

10. CONCLUSION

Translating is key to how India deals with the world, as old as the use of Sanskrit in Greece and China, and as new as today's short, viral stories. These efforts don't just shift words but whole worlds—showing India as a place of mix, movement, and on-going talks. The deep and long-term work in translating—from old royal times to today's smart tech—is making a future where India is shown true to itself, in many tongues, voices, and always changing written works.

The world sees India not just as one picture but as a living, changing art piece. This view is shaped by morals, art, tech, and common pasts. More and more big translations, new tech, and forward-thinking translation plans make sure that the world keeps seeing India in a deeper, wider, and more caring way.

11. STATEMENTS & DECLARATIONS:

Use of AI Statement

The authors declare that they have not used generative artificial intelligence, specifically ChatGPT in the writing of this manuscript and/or in the creation of images, graphics, tables, or their corresponding captions

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