



**Marwadi**  
education foundation

ISSN 2454-8537



**DEPARTMENT OF  
COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

# International Journal of Humanities In Technical Education

(A Bi-annual Refereed Journal)

**Vol: 3 | Issue: 2 | February, 2019**

## **Towards Humanizing Translation History in Gujarati**

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### **Lead-In**

While there is a growing need to focus on facts and put together bibliographies and lists, it is equally vital to focus on the human dimension of translation. It may be necessary to work out the date of a translation but it is equally important to shed light on the translator and his myriad motivations. In other words, it is imperative that we reconstruct not just the story of the text in translation but also reconstruct the story of the translator. It was Anthony Pym who used the phrase in the title of his celebrated paper, “Humanizing Translation History”.

When it comes to translation history, translations are generally documented and translators and their tales are lost. However, the fact of the matter is that it is, at times, impossible to account for the translation as it exists without humanizing the translation history or to put it plainly, without decoding the translator history. The reasons for humanizing translation history are far from sentimental; in fact, humanizing translation history holds the key to translation history to some extent. Translation is a subjective act. There are various factors at work. Translator works under many influences and compulsions. Until and unless we understand exactly why and how the translator acted in a particular manner, several aspects of translation history such as selection of the text, cultural leanings and methods adopted for translation would never be clear to us.

When it comes to translation history in Gujarati, the story is no different. There are volumes and volumes on Gujarati literature delineating the great and ordinary works of Gujarati literature. In these volumes, there are sketchy details of some if not all of translations which have occurred over the course of history. However, aspects that concern the translator still await rigorous excavation. We hardly know who these individuals were, how they lived and worked, what made them take up translation and why they translated the text that they did and why in a particular way. In this way, moving towards humanizing translation is less of a choice and more of a compulsion.

### **Why to humanize translation history?**

Translation history in Gujarati is basically non-existent. If at all, it exists as a foot-note in the volumes of Gujarati literary history published by various institutions and agencies. Mostly, it exists as a summary list of translations that occurred in the particular era in question with respect to Gujarati literary history. It is

assumed in such an endeavour that if we merely list the translations, it would suffice when it comes to the history related to translation.

There have been stray attempts to list translations in separate publications as a catalogue or bibliography. These publications also contain no explanation about these translations. It's merely a list of translations in a chronological order. It is again assumed that such a bibliography will make history clear to those who read it.

Such a list, while invaluable, only addresses the questions of “what”, “when”, “who” at the most. However, the basic historical question is always “why”. Such an exercise that leaves the “why” out of its scope does not explain or throw light on translations and serve no purpose other than stating the obvious.

Humanizing translations would shed light on “why” because it is essentially concerned with the human dimension of translation. It dwells basically on the part where human discretion or choice or inclinations come to play. It will focus on the larger field of the life, cultural pulls and pressures and intellectual climate of the times. Thus, humanizing translation history would not restrict itself to listing the translations in a chronological order but in fact devote itself to seeking answers of such an order.

### **Data Vs Insight**

History, when listed as a set of events in a chronological order, does not always come to life. It's the interpretation that infuses new life into events. Dates, names and places don't make history no matter how important they may be in deriving the interpretation. Limiting the exercise of translation history to a set of dates and a list of translations is a grave error of judgment.

Worse still, it is assumed that data is, on its own, transparent and self-explanatory. Bibliographies are important but the idea that bibliographies equal history or they are self-sufficient in terms of shedding light on history is inadequate. Most bibliographies would offer a fuzzy portrayal of history as it would present events which are apparently unconnected to one another unless we strive to decode it and discover links among them.

Translation history in Gujarati has unfortunately been limited to sketchy and inadequate data. It has so far been believed that as long as someone compiles the data, the job is done. It is a common perception across literary historians in Gujarati that data is enough in commenting on translation history. This is why they have merely listed translations instead of explaining or commenting upon them.

However, the fact of the matter is that data is nothing by itself. Insight is derived from analyzing data. At times, one needs to analyze, compare and contrast a set of data and derive an interpretation on one's own. Humanizing translation history is that kind of exercise. It will entail an exercise wherein it would be necessary to analyze the data as it exists in order to derive insights regarding the translations as they occurred in history.

At times, the insight will come from alternative sources of data. A mere list of translations will not be able to explain why translators behaved in a way that they did. A mere list will not be able to shed light on why they chose the texts that they did for translation. For throwing new light on all these, one will need to go away from the list and the data. One would need to take a plunge into the alternative data in the form of biographies, diaries, memoirs, gazettes, old catalogues, travelogues etc. in order to derive new insights.

Treating data as insight has been the cardinal error of translation history in Gujarati. Simply listing translations has given us some sense of the chronology but the answers regarding why translation history exists in a particular way would not come until and unless we humanize the translation history in Gujarati and reconstruct the past with respect to the individuals and the part they played in effecting these translations.

### **Subjectivize the Objective**

In writing of history, facts tend to represent the objective part of the process. There is a great deal of emphasis on the objective. That is why historians who comment on translation history tend to focus only on the factual, objective statements such as “A particular translator translated a particular text in a particular year” Or “A particular individual provided generous financial support to a set of translations”. While there is nothing wrong with these statements, these objective statements that contain the objective details of years and individuals hide the subjective part. The subjective part is that human beings have their specific purposes for their actions. This is why Anthony Pym insists, “As Bourdieu (1980: 19-36) said of his sociology, we must “subjectivize the objective” (the things we study have been created by people and made available by people, always acting with specific purposes)”.

If this be true, it opens up a whole new universe of possibilities with respect to translation history in Gujarati. Every objective statement related to translation history in Gujarati will then be subject to rigorous cross-examination regarding the “specific purposes”. In order to derive a deeper interpretation of the objective statements and facts related to translation history in Gujarati, we will need to mercilessly “subjectivize the objective”.

We will no longer be able to restrict ourselves to stating the obvious. We will need to ask and raise questions regarding how and why a particular individual decided to translate a particular text and under what circumstances. We will need to uncover connections between individuals that we may not be able to see merely on the basis of known facts. It would be imperative that we focus on the “specific purposes”, hidden agendas and deeper intentions of people involved in the process of the conception and publication of a translation. The investigation will not be restricted to the translator alone; it will extend to the patrons, influential individuals in the form of translation scholars and writers of the given time period, and agencies.

### **Shedding Light on Cultural Role of Translators**

Humanizing translation history would also need to explore the cultural contribution of translators. As it happens in any cultural context, there are translators who are not primarily translators or even writers. The same holds true for translation history in Gujarati.

Unlikely or lesser known translators like Meghani, Mahadevbhai Desai etc. played a cultural role while translating the texts in Gujarati. Translation history that focuses on the cultural role played translators would throw new light on the contribution of these individuals who were not primarily concerned with translation when it comes to their area of work. However, they volunteered and extended their service as translators in order to usher in different texts from and into Gujarati.

Simply listing the texts that Meghani or Mahadevbhai Desai translated would not suffice the purpose of translation history. It would entail a far deeper analysis of what led these individuals to take up translation of these texts in the first place. If we delve on this part of translation history in Gujarati, it would enrich our understanding of how these works got translated from and into Gujarati. It is for a deeper and fuller understanding of why and how these translations occurred that one needs to resort to humanizing translation history in Gujarati.

### **Study Translators First and Then Texts**

In the light of how sociology of translation is so crucial, Anthony Pym goes to the extent of arguing that one must study the translators first and then the texts. Whether this is necessary or not, it helps us look at our own leaning towards the text and how we ignore the translator when it comes to translation history. For instance, we may be interested in learning more about the translations of Shakespeare's plays but we don't bother to study the individuals who translated Shakespeare's plays. We pay them lip service by simply mentioning their names here and there, as if that is all.

On the contrary, it is by studying these translators that we can uncover how these translations came into being. Until and unless we understand how these individuals lived, thought and worked, it is not possible to understand the translations as they exist. In their different inclinations and deeper intentions, it is possible to piece together the process of how the translations took the shape.

Studying the translator would entail a study of his/her life, political and cultural inclinations, reasons/rationale for translation per se and for the selection of particular texts, his/her professional relations with other translators/writers and their intellectual exchanges or debts to each other and the key turns of events that led to these translations. It would also call for the understanding of the historical context in which the translator

worked because he/she needs to at time navigate the contextual pressures and carry out the translation related work.

Translation history in Gujarati has a lot of gain by humanizing its focus. It will enrich our understanding of who these individuals were, how they went about their work and why they did the particular kind of work when it comes to translation. It will also help us understand the cultural and historical context better which is vital for understanding translation history.

### **Unearthing the Undercurrent of Patronage**

Existing model of translation history in Gujarati also tends to assume that translations occurred because translators simply translated and got it published. In other words, it seems that there is no need to discover who funded these translations and why. It is of no interest to the translation historians that why certain texts got translated and certain texts did not. Least of all, there is no attempt to find out as to what transpired between translators and the powerful and influential individuals around them.

In the case of Gujarati, it is clear that a large number of translations got to see the light of the day because of wealthy individuals generously provided funds for them. The dedication in the first few pages of these translations and the whole-hearted eulogies to these individuals is proof enough that these individuals lent generous support for these translations to get published.

However, to “subjectivize the objective”, it would be necessary to discover why they funded a particular kind of translations or why translators translated a particular kind of texts. It would be interesting to find out whether translators selected a set of texts by their free will or it was because the patrons had a liking for certain kinds of texts. It would be relevant to cross-examine the “objective” and throw light on the “subjective” part of the translation that made all the difference.

Humanizing the translation history would require that we reconstruct the role that patrons played in the course of translation history. It will be necessary to discover how these individuals influenced translator decisions and in turn influenced translation history. Humanizing translation history must not restrict itself to the study of translator alone; it must extend to the patrons and their contribution and influence in the translation history.

### **Exploring the Politics of Translation**

Since translation is a process that involves the element of choice and a considerable amount of power that translators and patrons can wield, the idea of politics of translation is likely to remain relevant for any endeavor in translation history. This is not because it is interesting to study the politics of translation per se but it serves to explain what a list of dates and names fails to explain.

At present, there is no effort in Gujarati translation history to uncover any such strands of politics of translation history. The reason is that the focus is on the obvious and the objective. The focus is inflexibly locked on the facts and facts alone. However, a full understanding of history would be possible only if we take into consideration the individual choices and inclinations. It will be possible only when we uncover the links between events and individuals that facts don't point out to us at the moment.

While the West has explored the politics of translation to a fair degree, translation history in Gujarati has yet to make any serious foray in this arena. It would be wise to remember that it would be a part of humanizing translation history that one would need to explore politics of translation and seek the answers of complex questions regarding how certain texts got privileged and how certain individuals wielded power to effect certain translations. Humanizing translation history in Gujarati will require the maturity and open-mindedness to accept that a few skeletons may come out of the closet and to embrace the fact that all that glitters in history is not gold!

### **From Conclusions to Questions**

Rather than treating history as a foregone conclusion, it would be better to replace conclusions with some questions that can shed new light on history. Humanizing translation history is in no way an attempt to provide conclusions or final answers but lead the march back to important questions. Without important questions, the quest of history cannot be undertaken. Any pursuit of history is incomplete without a set of inconvenient questions. In the present model of translation history in Gujarati, there are only conclusions. There are no questions. There is no effort to formulate questions even based on the data that exists. Leave alone chasing answers, we have yet to articulate the key questions regarding translation history in Gujarati. It is particularly disturbing to see that there are no questions regarding the very part which is subjective- the act of translation.

Humanizing translation history would prompt us to move in the direction of questions that concern the motivation of translators, actions of patrons and translation strategies. These questions would lead us to a deeper and fuller understanding of what transpired in history and what made these translations possible. With these questions, it will also be possible to shed new light on existing facts that we don't seem to understand today. We need to cling on to these questions and keep revisiting the past for newer interpretations. This is what engaging with history underscores.

Humanizing translation history is not for the sake of doing so. It is for the express purpose of arriving at a more authentic account of history pertaining to translation. Exploring these uncharted terrains is not because they seem fascinating but because they will lead us to territories that we never thought existed. However, the

only way we can hope to make some headway in this journey is to focus on questions. It is the starting point of this expedition and it would be good to remember that it's a never ending one!

### Lead-Out

Translation history cannot be merely a stale account of already-known facts. Any effort at history must break new ground and present a new interpretation of known facts. While translation history in Gujarati is richly endowed, little effort has been made to uncover newer interpretations.

Moving towards humanizing translation history will help us accomplish such a goal of deriving newer interpretations from history that is taken for granted. As long as we remain committed to newer interpretations and fuller account of translation history, humanizing translation history can help us and be our guiding light. It would be appropriate to revisit the set of data and facts for a deeper analysis of stories and tales that they hide so that we can present a more authentic and more humanized translation history in Gujarati!

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