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Emergence of Military Thriller in Gujarati

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Abstract

Thriller as a genre comes under the domain of popular fiction which has been defined as 'art as commodity'(Walker). English popular fiction has a long history and has shown changes in its various poetics throughout time. Alistair Maclean has contributed extensively to the genre of thriller. He is known for writing war thrillers and noir thrillers. Modern thriller poetics have included certain elements, which were invented by him. In comparison, Gujarati thriller fiction is new, as it emerged during 1960s.(Luhar, 4)Translations of various English popular writers had an important role in that, as translations played important role in creating Gujarati identity, as it was immediately after Mahagujarat andolan which was a political movement demanding creation of state of Gujarat for Gujarati speaking people. Which resulted into formation of the state in 1960. This era also saw two major wars with neighboring nations, namely China and Pakistan. This was a post-Gandhian and post-independence time, which saw a quest for Gujarati identity in popular culture.

André Lefevere's 'Text, System and refraction in a theory of literature (1982) theorizes translations as 'refractions' which are results of certain systematic constraints and how refractions play an important role in the evolution of the literature. This paper will study the novels by Alistair Maclean(1922-1987) translated by Ashwinee Bhatt(1936-2012) into Gujarati. The main focus of this paper will be on Guns of Navarone(1957) and Where Eagles Dare(1967). These were translated into Gujarati in the mid 1960s. It will use the theoretical framework of 'translation as refraction' by Lefevere. This paper will look into the historical context how aftermath of Mahagujarat Andolan shaped these texts to bring out the Gujarati identity. Moreover, the relation of Indo-China war(1962) and Indo-Pak war(1965) with emergence of interest in military thrillers will be discussed. Also, this paper will try to identify and explain certain compulsions (or constraints) which made translator adopt certain strategies to accommodate the text in Gujarati popular fiction. A particular focus will be on how it was accommodated in context of its depiction of physical violence. How patronage, language and

poetics are influencing constraints for this case. Moreover, a particular focus on language and narrative style will see how the text and genre of thriller migrated into Gujarati culture. Also, how language and dialects are used to create a hegemonic Gujarati identity. Furthermore, I will also look into how these translations were quintessential post-Gandhian popular literary works.

Keywords: Translation Studies, Alistair Maclean, Thrillers, Refraction theory, Gujarati literary system

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Introduction

Translation studies has undergone paradigm shift as it has move beyond idea of searching 'equivalence'. Instead, It studies translation as a kind of rewriting and tries to see it in the context of its culture and history. After cultural turn Descriptive translation studies has taken a broader approach to understand translation as a result of socio-cultural process of a society. So, Normative approach of 'good' and 'bad' is not relevant in this time. Moreover, translation studies also has move beyond the hierarchy of 'original' as superior and 'translated' as inferior. Now, as translation is considered as rewriting of source text, target text is given equal importance.

Theoretical Framework

André Lefevere's 'Text, System and Refraction in a theory of literature'(1982) is one such paper in which he talks about system approach to literature, where literature is a system, embedded in the environment of the society and culture. Texts produced in it and people who write, publish, read and critique it are part of that system. Patronage given to authors has three components: ideological, economical and status quo. Where it is provided by a single authority it's called undifferentiated patronage. When different ideologies are supported by different patrons, and economical component doesn't remain linked with ideological. Every patronage has a poetics which presents an idea of how literature should be. In Differentiate patronage various poetics competes to dominate market and culture. So, Lefevere sees translation as a refraction, which tries to carry a work of literature from one system to another, represents a compromise between two systems and is, as such, a perfect indicator of the dominant constraints of the both systems. He talks about constraints of Language, Patronage and Poetics. 'Translation as refeaction' is suitable theoretical framework for this study as it talks about how migration of one author from one system to another refracts his work under the systemic constraints of both system and how it helps in the evolution of literature in receiving system.

During 1960s Yaqub Mansuri, a private publisher in Gujarat, commissioned two journalists Ahwinee Bhatt and Bakul Vora to translate 'western potboilers'(Kothari, R, 266). These were famous thrillers by James Headly Chase, Sidney Sheldon, Agatha Christie, John Gardner and Alistair Maclean. Newly educated class which was emerging after independence was the intended audience of these works. Translations of Alistair Maclean's novels became more popular than others. One of the reasons was the fame of movie adaptation. That drew a large number of readers to read his translated works.

Alistair Maclean (1922-1987) was a 20th century novelist writing in thriller genre. His war novels and spy novels had redefined the term 'bestseller' and marked a unique style in the thriller fiction (Liquisearch). His novels show complete focus on action, with minute treatment to plot. Absence of romance makes his fiction more realistic. His characters are usually calm, cynical men entirely devoted to their work. Instead of gadgetry, he relies on the mental and physical ability of the characters and pushes them to limit. Movie adaptations of his novels have been successful and his novels have been translated into many languages.

Guns of Navarone (1957) and Where Eagles Dare (1967) were his most famous works, which are considered as milestones in military fiction genre. Characters are well drawn and serve as realistic portrayal of commando missions and its war is closer to reality. Plots have been woven as a series of the twists and turns to keep reader interested. They have been narrated in formal style with markers of the military register. These novels have influenced many writers in terms of plot structure and narration. Writers like Tom Clancy and Lee Child seem to have influenced by his plot structure, especially with putting a twist at the end of plot.

Gujarati Literary System

Gujarati popular fiction seems to be younger than other Indian languages like Hindi or Bengali as it flourished only after India became an independent country. The increasing literacy rate and availability of local printers created a need and support for more reading material. (Luhar) One of the major motivations was to create a commercial market through this readership. Popular fiction took its form as serialization of the novels published in magazines and supplement reading of the newspapers. Zaverchand Meghani(1896- 1947), Gunavantray Aacharya(1900-1965) and Kanaiyalal Munshi(1887-1971) were popular before independence. Translation of foreign works provided new challenges to both writers and readers. Vaju Kotak(1915-1959), Harkishan Mehta(1928-1998), Ashwinee Bhatt experimented with thriller and made it popular in the Gujarati market.

Ashwinee Bhatt(1936-2012) primarily a journalist and dramatist, was launched as a novelist in a newspaper. He combined thriller genre with historical and contemporary settings. His lively descriptions, believable plot lines, use of multi-languages were characteristics of his novels. He had translated Maclean into Gujarati which became popular during his time. Modern thriller writers like Dhaivat Trivedi and Nilesh Rupapara are influenced by his writings. (Kothari, U)

But these translations were not adopted completely as it is from source text. There are number of differences between ST and TT. In terms of Lefevere's system approach described in his paper, these translations can be considered as refractions. Lefevere talks about system approach, which sees any literature as a literary system. Literature produced in Gujarati language and in the state of Gujarat can be considered as a literary system,

namely Gujarati literary system. One can argue that Gujarati literary system shows differentiated patronage. Various publication houses, government funded academies, university presses and small publication units etc. Publish books in various formats. According to Lefevere this kind of patronage leads various poetics to compete for the dominance over the culture and market. Lefevere defines poetics as 'a kind of code of behaviour'. This poetics of thriller was the need of the receiving literary system.

Though it had a demand in the market, TT had to go through certain changes. Lefevere points out various constraints for this kind of refractions. In fact, these constraints makes a translation a 'refraction'(Lefevere, 235).

Constraints of Economy and Language

Both of Maclean's works as physical books were hardback (also paperback at cheaper price) containing 288(GON) and 352(WED) pages. Titles have bigger font size than author's name and occupy top space on cover. Both TTs contains less than 200 pages. Both STs contains approximately 1,00,000 words. TTs contains approximately 50,000 words. No doubt, English and Gujarati has different grammar structures and vocabulary patterns, so difference of such kind is expected. But the difference is 45% here, which indicates economical constraint of publisher who wanted to make TTs available at a cheaper price. So, economical constraint seems to be effective here in shaping of target texts.

The structure of language differs between English and Gujarati. English shows S+V+O structure in a sentence while Gujarati shows S+O+V structure. So, "He was just bluff and simple sailor." Becomes tekevalkharvanaswang ma hto. The major difference here is in the order of the impartation of information that character is impersonating a sailor comes at the end of sentence in English. In Gujarati, it comes in the middle of the sentence. This constraint of grammar structure affects the writing style. Major function of descriptive passages in thriller is to create suspense and excitement in reader. So, The translator has overcome the problem by changing the rank of translation from sentence to paragraph. In ST the introduction of Jensen goes like this:

“Mallory shrugged, then followed on more slowly, step for step with the third member of the group, a broad,....., intrigue, deception, imitation and disguise were the breath of life to Captain James Jensen, D.S.O., R.N.”

In TT, It goes like this:

Melory e khabhasankodyaanegrupkeptannipachhadchalyo. Te j sathetemisathenatrijamas e kadam milavinechalvamandyu. EnunamhtuJensan, khadatal kaya dharavta e aadminichal ma dariyakhedunievitehalakhtukemeloryvichar ma padyo. Tenichal ma kharvaonanutrajevilyakarihti.

Here, Translator has changed the formation of paragraph by introducing character by name first and background later. He has divided full paragraph into four little paragraphs, which serves functional as impartation of information becomes consumable into parts. This strategy enables translator to show character's importance as a military officer. This also shows how translator has embedded local imagery like 'kharvaonanutra' (dance of sailors) in a foreign text which helps make reader familiarize with the text.

Bhatt has used pragmatic language in translation. He has used local imagery to make the text familiarize with reader. Also, He has omitted references which may have been unknown to his readers. Terms like 'bottle of talisker' or 'cloak-and-dagger' have been excluded because receiving culture has no references for them. Phrases like 'vahbahotkhub' or 'kya bat he sahab' denotes translator's strategy to include Hindi language phrases popular in culture of Mumbai, Which had a large number of Gujarati readers. In addition to that he has also included various dialects of Gujarati language to communicate with readers from all over Gujarat. He has translated word 'joker' as 'dagla' and 'jamburia' which are the two different words denoting same meaning in two different dialects of Gujarati language.

Constraints of Patronage and Poetics

However, where the description of action has been translated, Translator has to tackle more than different language structures. He needs to 'refract' it on a way that can be understood by an average Gujarati reader, who may not have even passive understanding of mountaineering and sailing like an average Englishman. The passage in ST has full description:

“There was no time for any more. The caique was swinging in broadside to, teetering on the crest of a wave, as high up thewithout their own volition, and he was almost half-way over, propelled by one gigantic heave from below.....been better had it been parallel to the face — and more than the width of a matchstick. But it was enough for Mallory. With infinite care he eased the hammer and a couple of spikes from his belt, worked a spike into the crack to obtain a minimal purchase, slid the other in some inches nearer, hooked his left wrist round the first,Fifteen seconds later he was standing on the ledge.”

Maclean has certainly used more descriptive words which makes the picture of mallory on cliff more realistic. Gujarati translation is as follow:

mojanajangihilodasathemangeriunchkai. Melory ne khayal avyoke have nahi to kyareynai. Kudvu hoy to aa j takhti. Tenepagvadhuvalyaanejevujahajkhadaknipadkheavyuketarattenekukomaryo. Techaatan par chadyo. Khadaknilisidhar par teneanglathipakadlidhi.

The constraint here is of two different cultural knowledge tradition. Gujarati culture, especially the readership of such novels, had little knowledge of mountaineering or sailing. Translator discards technical words and relies on imaginative description like 'khadaknidhar par tenianglioehontirahi.'

Another compulsion which translator to differ from ST is of narrative style. ST has third person omniscient narrator while TT has detached observer narrator, who refrains himself from adding opinions and has restricted knowledge of characters. Bhatt's narrator seems to fit into this category which also makes sense when he shortens the descriptions of the action as well as the characters. The reason for choosing this narrative style is in the profession of the translator. Bhatt has practiced journalism in third person limited narration, appropriate for the medium. He has chosen the same while translating to give a sense of familiarity to readers, who read newspapers in similar narrative style. So, Style of TT serves as a tool to make the ST believable in the receiving literary system and culture.

Lefevere says that, "Producers of both refracted and original literature do not operate as automatons under the constraints of their time and location. They devise various strategies to live with these constraints, ranging hypothetically from full acceptance to full defiance." Bhatt had to employ certain strategies to accommodate TT into Gujarati literary system. Lefevere points out four such strategies. In this case the third strategy seems most suitable which is, "one can integrate the new poetics into old one by translating its concepts into more familiar terminology of old poetics."

Bhatt has used 'popular heritage' of Gujarati fiction to accommodate Guns of Navarone, which being a military thriller, does not have a poetics in receiving culture due to its different cultural history. Gujarati culture has history of small states coexisting in an interconnected political system sharing similar languages and culture codes. In contrast Guns of Navarone shows ideological and national formation of army fighting against a different national army formed with different ideological codes. This difference may confuse a reader in perception of stakes and conflicts in the plot.

However, In 1960s India had seen one war with a neighbor nation. Idea of Nationalism was in formation. So, Translation of such texts satisfied the curiosity of readers about national armies and modern warfare techniques. So, Military abbreviations in ST have been expanded in the TT for better understanding of such concepts. Such examples are: A.A- anti aircraft , W/T- wireless transmission, M.T.B. - motor torpedo boat

It is to be noted that translator has retained SL nouns in TL script, which must be known to his readership once he expands the abbreviations. ST uses military register, which makes ST a realistic military fiction. Maclean and his generation had to go to war. So, Military register is known to his readership. Following passage shows that:

“«They gave you clear weather?»

«Yeah. Clear weather. It was ten-tenths over the target,» Torrance said bitterly. «We had to go down to fifteen hundred. Not that...clean off. Might as well have dropped a shower of leaflets asking them to “spike their own bloody guns... . Then they've got every second A.A. gun in the south of Europe concentrated along this narrow 50-degree vector — the only way you can approach the target,...even get half-way towards the harbour... They never had a chance.»”

Gujarati readership didn't have much military experiences. So, translator has changed language style from formal to casual with markers(with explanations) of military register in TT. Translation of that passage:

'dhulkahyuhtu.... Are amareamarunishanmelvavachhekpandarsofutniunchaiethivimanolavvapadya. Chhekdariyajetla niche vimanoutarya hot to kashuvalatnahi. E tekrievi rite zukelichhekenishan par bomb fekisakaynahi.'

This style helps reader understand the stakes and dangers in the plot without knowing military register. Also this style seems to be translator's choice as experimental for selected translation. Here, translator seems to employ fourth strategy described by Lefevere. Which is,"to explain the new poetics and to show that the system can, in fact, accommodate it, and can allow it to enter into the inventory and functional components of its poetics, without necessarily going to pieces."

Conclusion

The choice of Alistair Maclean is very interesting. Maclean's early work projects a certain ideology. They are presented as war stories, but in reality they do not depict war. They present war on a small scale. Guns of Navarone features a group of soldiers in a nearly impossible situation. Where Eagles Dare features a small scale infiltration into enemy intelligent agency. Both novels avoid large scale battles or situations. They glorify deeds of individuals against great odds. Maclean puts number of 'macho' characters as protagonists. Even female characters show that kind of attitude as it becomes a characteristic of being a soldier. Main focus here is on the survival of protagonist(s) while moving forward the action toward a climax. The ideological structure of these two novels is more or less same. They depict journey of some individuals who are put in a dangerous situation. Whole journey goes as a series of twists and turns which keeps readers interested and

thrilled. At the end protagonist heroically wins the day. It represents nationalist ideology where such individual would do anything for the protection of their motherland.

Such ideology is not unknown in Indian history. There are many famous narratives where small numbers of individual were put against great odds. In Gujarati culture, there are many narratives which depict struggles of individuals against bigger forces. There are monuments in various villages of the state called paliya, which indicate the cultural importance given to this kind of ideology. But this folk literature doesn't consist sense of nationalism. There has been literature glorifying this kind of ideology. Zaverchand Meghani and Gunavantray Aacharya wrote this kind of stories. So, there was a receptive trend for this kind of story when translations of Maclean were published, which were presenting similar ideological structure, thus familiarity. What was new here was the sense of nationalism which comes with the idea of another nation. India had been a newly independent country then; these refractions provided a kind of idea of Nation vs. Nation. Another aspect of Maclean's works was use of military tactics, strategies and experiences to shape those narratives. The Indo-china war of 1962 and Indo-pak war of 1965 had created an immense interest in military life among general public. These wars were fought on great Himalayan heights and dense jungles. Maclean's novels feature such kind of extraordinary geographical locations. Furthermore, Gujarati culture and literature was moving away from Gandhian era which made it possible to bring violence in the fiction as popular taste was changing. So, these works by Maclean featured best possible ideological and narrative structures suitable to receiving system's cultural history and historical context.

Bhatt mentions the ST and its movie adaptation in the preface."jivnatalvechontetevi aa katha Alistair macleanniatyantprakhayatnavalkathachhe." He using the fame of author in his native poetics as a ideal one to follow in the Gujarati culture. By proclaiming ST as a popular text in English culture with adjective breathlessly thrilling makes it marketable in the Gujarati literary system. This words reappear on the back-cover of the TT also. This indicates publisher's strategy to give translation a status of 'classic-like' by mentioning the movie adaptation also,"This novel has been adopted into classic film." (Back cover information)

Ashiwini Bhatt had translated 'Guns of Navarone' by Alistair Maclean under certain compulsions. The cultural and political background caused ST to be refracted in certain ways which resulted in TT. Applying Lefevere's model for refraction one may conclude that TT has been translated through constraints of language, patronage and poetics.

The length of the text has been shortened by 45%. The cover of the book shows the movie poster of adaptation from ST. This shows patronage as constraints for the translator, who had to write in a limit in terms

of pages and wages. The shortened length also has constraint of poetics as thriller genre was not evolved in the Gujarati literature. Drawing upon the older poetics, Bhatt has shortened the descriptions to increase the pace of the story. He has not made any changes in terms of characters or plot, which was a need of the Gujarati literary system to import such work of thriller with new kind of plot-devices. Constraint of language has been solved by converting the narrative style and using multiple dialects of Gujarati language. The cultural background of ST and TT are very different from one another. Translator has explained unknown terms by circumlocution and omitted unnecessary references, instead he has used imaginative language to make plot believable in the Gujarati culture.

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