

In Translation: Positions and Paradigms

by Anisur Rahman. Orient Blackswan, Delhi, 2019.

The book, *In Translation: Positions and Paradigms*, containing 10 essays by Anisur Rahman, looks closely at the translation theories and practices relevant to India. The book is divided into two parts of five essays each. The first essay in the book ‘Author, Text, Translator, Reader: The New Indian Context’, discusses the relationship amongst these four in a literary culture. It is a fact that many times when translation is involved there seems to be a power tussle between the writer and the translator that impacts the text and the reader. Rahman extensively discusses the significance of each of these entities and comes up with five models of empowerment that also comment on how these entities are dependent on each other. He observes that the present literary scenario in India is conducive to new discourses and multiple perspectives, and reiterates how an author, reader and translator can keep a text alive for the future. The second essay takes up the question of translatability in a multilingual, multicultural site like India. He argues that ‘all human expressions are putting a language in order, and finding ways to translate it by changing the order’ (p. 26). He discusses the many ways a translator might change this order, developing a conduit with the reader, thus tackling the issue of untranslatability. Rahman emphatically points towards the ‘fluidity and fantasy of experience and expression’ (p. 44) both in an original and a translation enabling subsequent/multiple versions of a text facilitating the growth of literary traditions. He takes this idea further in the next chapter, ‘Translation as Dialogue’ and investigates how writing and translating is a dialogic and collaborative process.

In a translation, collaboration is not just at the level of individual texts but also at the level of author, literary cultures, fellow translators and reader and even with the publisher and the market. Much might be lost and gained in this process. Rahman thus underlines the idea that ‘every text is, in a major way, an unfinished text’ (p. 55). He argues that any Indian text must be appreciated in this continuum, in view of this collaboration or dialogue with the multiplicity of languages, philosophies, cultures and sub-cultures that happens through centuries. The fourth chapter reasons that translation and discourse are similar in that both ‘unmask the word’ and are dialogic. A translator helps to situate a discourse in a community of new discourses, and sometimes problematizes and even rewrites a discourse. In chapter five, ‘Broadening the Frontier: Towards a Poetics of Painting and Architecture’, Rahman draws a parallel between translation and other arts such as painting and architecture. Taking up the idea of pattern language he argues that a translator is a writer of pattern language and demonstrates this with some interesting examples.

The second section titled 'Paradigms' talks about some specific translational activity and texts. In a well researched and interesting essay, 'Translation as Empowerment', Rahman elaborates the activities of The College of Fort William in colonial India. While the colonial power did get to extend their knowledge and grip over India through some of the translations undertaken, it is also important to note that the colonized also got empowered in more ways than one. The next essay 'Translating Representation: The Problematic of Indian Literature' starts with the argument that any literature is a representation, while its translation is a re-representation. This again brings forth the possibility of multiple representations at the level of the message and at the level of the medium. Rahman, before coming back to the concept of translation, broadly sketches the myriad ways of representation in Indian literature in translation from the Vedic time to the postcolonial period. The kind of texts that were translated and the method of translation often betrayed a desire to impress the West. This of course has changed in today. Rahman argues that 'translating India has ever been (a) a historical necessity (b) a political inevitability (c) an administrative exigency and (d) a cultural imperative' (p. 154). He posits much hope in the fact that academics and theorists are now engaged more meaningfully with the translation of Indian texts.

The last three chapters are devoted to Urdu poetry which is Anisur Rahman's forte; he himself being a translator of Urdu poetry. The chapter 'Translating the Urdu Ghazal: The Classical Contexts of Meer and Ghalib' takes up the specific challenges a translator might come across in translating the ghazal since as a form it is alien to the English language. He puts forward the idea of primary translation – as the translation of ideas into words – and secondary translation as the translation into a different language. He highlights the many layered meanings and therefore the ambiguity that could surround each line, making the translation of the ghazal a real trial for the translator.

The next essay, 'Translating Modern Urdu Poetry: Creating Canons in Translation', first outlines the trajectory of modernism in Urdu poetry and takes up some important works in English translation for detailed discussion. He rues the fact that more engagement is required from translators of Urdu poetry so that it gains from and gives to other literary traditions and canons. The last essay in the book, 'Translating a Form: The Possible/Impossible Ghazal in English', Rahman explores the question of form through the specific context of the ghazal before discussing attempts by various poets at writing ghazals in English. This proves that the form is still vibrant but that it is also inevitable the ghazal in English is different. This has to be appreciated as it brings in a new order of composition and a new readership.

While the 1990s were more concerned with colonial translation as a site of encounter, it is remarkable that many writers in these volumes have tried to move away from an East-West polarity and have looked at these interactions more as engaging and even

empowering activities. However, the need to recognize India as a different translational zone while apprising translational activities in India is underscored. Interestingly, the books approach the field from different angles – from the language perspective; from the focus on the idea of India; and through the lens of translation as a cultural and literary concept. All of them highlight that the plurality of India, constituted of its many languages, cultures, philosophies, and encounters with the outside world, is intrinsic to understand the translation activities here. This plurality needs to be extended to the idea of translation too. What is more important is to appreciate the context and politics of each translated text, so that each version of the translated text can contribute towards an understanding of the larger literary and cultural history. In the current political scenario surrounding authenticity about citizenship and nationalism, these books send out a very strong message.

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