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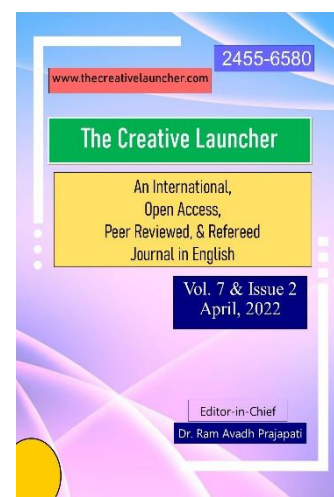
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☞ Research Article

A Comparative Study of Manoj Das's *Akasara Isara* (Odia) and *The Escapist* (English)

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Abstract

There are very few bilingual writers of repute in the country and Manoj Das distinctly stands as a prolific writer who has carved a niche for himself in this arena. In fact, he is one of the greatest writers of the country, who has given a new direction to the bilingual writing and proved his brilliance through his great short stories and novels both in Odia and English languages with his creative genius. He is one of the widely acclaimed bilingual story tellers of the country whose writings have been accepted by the readers for their novelty of thoughts and flawless narration. Many prestigious literary awards like the Sahitya Akademi Award, the Padma Shri and the Saraswati Samman and many more have been bestowed upon him. He is

in fact one of the towering literary personalities in the Indian English fictions arena who has been instrumental in establishing a native identity. His in-depth analysis of human emotions and their universal appeal is something that is amazingly brilliant in his writings. He has been widely acclaimed and appreciated for his literary genius and creative brilliance. The present research article attempts a comparative study of these two novels which are unique with their thematic treatment as well as the subtle realities combined with powerful philosophical messages. His novel *Akasara Isara* (1997) which originally appeared in Odia and later translated by the author himself in English as *The Escapist* (2001) describes the human tragedy against the backdrop of an all-pervading destiny. The article discusses such issues of translation and bilingual writing. It also focuses on the cultural aspects.

Keywords- Bilingual Writing, Translation, Comparative Study, Transcultural Study

Literature Review and Discussion

“Translation is not a matter of words only, it is a matter of making intelligible a whole culture,” Anthony Burgess once said rightly. For a bilingual writer, Translation of a literary text is a multi-creative activity. There are different aspects to consider. Further, globalisation has created a need for a qualitative translation in a competitive market. In a way, it is also a medium of cultural communication. It fosters understanding of other cultures, and thus, narrows down the barriers. In this way the world comes closer. Translation is both an art a science. Therefore, every translator develops his / her own strategies to fill up the cultural gaps between two languages and cultures. It may vary according to the type of the text, purpose of translation, and the target audience. And that’s why, Brower (1959:233) notes: “Translation from one language to other substitutes the message in some other language. Such a translation recedes and transmits a message received from another source. Thus, translation involves two equivalent messages in two different codes.”

The cultural aspect of translation is definitely more important. In a broader perspective it assumes a lot of significance. Literature is often considered as the mirror of the society. And so, the aim of literary translation ideally is “a successful translation” of the culture too. The translator should have a thorough association with and the understanding not only of the SL (Source Language) and TL (Target Language) but of the source and target cultures as well. With culture, it has also to carry forward the sense, emotional appeal, and the connotations of the original work. Newmark comments, “All the translations must be in some degree communicative and semantic, social and individual. It is a matter of difference of emphasis.” Manoj Das does justice to the same as a bilingual writer.

He is a master story teller who creates magic with his creative imagination and subtle understanding of complex human behaviour. One of the most loved Odia writers, he passed away recently creating a void in the world of creative literature of great sense. His magical recreation of a common man’s world especially in rural setting is unmatched. His understating of rural India with its varied hues draws us closer to the national feeling. He does justice to the field of Indo-Anglian writings. Writers of his stature are really very rare. He is compared to Samuel Backet in that he has chosen to produce his fictional works bilingually.

Probably because he hails from a rural set up, he provides an authentic picture of Indian way of life in a lucid and simple way through his works in the most lucid way. Born in 1934, Manoj Das comes from a village called 'Sankhari' full of natural charm and beauty in Balasore district of Odisha. Right from his school days, he was a Marxist, a rebel and a fiery student leader. He joined Shri Aurobindo Ashram in 1963. This was a transitional phase of his life. We do find a reflection of these in his writings which are quite obvious. His writings are quintessentially Indian reflecting the native sentiments with universal appeal. He is a great personality who has evolved through various phases of life. It is needless to say his stories are marked by richness, depth, sensitivity, vividness and significance.

The Cultural Issues:

The novel *Escapist* begins in a dramatic note with the central character Padmalochan arriving in a city from a rural setting in search of his destiny. However, circumstances make his life complicated and bizarre throughout the narration. Towards the end, he accidentally turns out to be a philosopher and discovers the true meaning of his own existence in the context of a larger universe. The novel moves from the different turns and twists. The narrator also makes a scathing attack on the emerging "Sadhu Baba Culture" in our Indian society. The hypocrisy of the people in power, their hollowness, lack of moral values and most importantly the innocence and ignorance of the common people have been rightly highlighted with a touch of humour by the writer. Beneath the comic elements, there are serious messages for the society to heed. There are many comical elements in the novel which are hilarious and leaves an indelible mark in the memory of the readers. He presents the various aspects of human psyche in both the novels aptly. Another important aspect of the narration in both the novels is the spiritual awakening of the main character.

The novel *The Escapist* is not just a translation work of Manoj Das. In fact, it's much more than that. The narrator has creatively presented many aspects of the novel and has perfectly done justice to being a bilingual writer. The title of the book itself is quite significant. In Odia language, it's metaphorically been used indicating all-pervading destiny in human life and the call of the spiritual awakening too. However, the title in English has got a different connotation. The protagonist of the story could not in fact escape from the ultimate reality of life. Towards the end of the novel, he realizes the sublime experience he passed through. In the words of Manoj Das- O My sky, you are yourself a form of my sense of gratitude-you're a form of myself. So many times, you've conveyed this to me through hints subtle and sublime. At last, you brought me to realization – you are I and I am you. You've always been above me, be it night or day. You've been always within and around me. But how little I knew you! O my sky! O my Milky Way!

The chapter 1 of *the Escapist* is an apt example of the creative freedom a bilingual writer takes while recasting the narratives. The question of fidelity does not apply since the author himself is the recreator here. There are certain cultural issues too which have been aptly taken care by the narrator. "Pana Gua" (Betel leaf and Nut) in the source language becomes "few needs grocery". In a typical Odia culture "Pana Gua" occupies an important place. However, "few groceries" can do the justice in the target language.

Manoj Das has the ability to transform an ordinary incident into a significant one and convey a great philosophy of life. The ‘death of Chhaku Jena’s goat scene’ in the novel is one such episode. However, the description of the same is more appealing in the source language text. The native readers will probably get more connected to the detailed description of the scene. The narration of Natwar Sir’s speech which follows the death of Chhaku Jena’s goat is a significant point of the narration. This has been aptly presented with a satirical note in both the texts.

At times the narrator excels in both the languages in terms of the creative expression and the use of indigenous collocation. He rightly catches the tone of an elderly village woman who would refer to “Natawar Mater” as “Latabara Master” because of the old age. Such minute observations are only possible in the writing of Manoj Das.

There are many such cultural aspects in both the texts which the narrator has beautifully handled negotiating through the carefully chosen words and expressions.

As a bilingual writer Manoj Das has got his own distinct way of presenting the sensibilities in both the languages flawlessly. He is not someone who would merely translate from the source language to target language. He has the complex responsibility of transferring the sense and meaning exactly as he wants to recreate the magic in the target language. That makes his narration in both the texts alive and fresh.

The Bilingual Narrative Style:

As a seasoned Bilingual writer, Manoj Das has got his own gripping narrative style which is evident in both the texts. Narration in his fictions is not all that one finds on the surface only. Its real beauty lies in the coherence built internally by various narrative elements such as the narrator, perception, modes of narration and the narratee. His narration holds the attention of the readers and keep him or her glued to the texts.

The use of simile is something very important in the texts of Manoj Das. He makes use of similes that make us understand and relish the native touch of his writing. There is essentially a sense of complete Indianness. A native reader will find a sort of familiarity of experiences through these similes. The examples of such use of similes are abundant in both the texts.

He maintains the high aesthetics in his writings. Specially while talking about nature, Manoj Das is excellent in both texts. For every human situation, nature has a role to play. He always talks about the all-pervading nature in human life. He uses rich languages in both the texts talking about it.

The Target Text offers the readers another sublime experience of his narration of nature. When one reads the target text one can feel as if you are reading a different book with new set of experience. He presents the same experience in a different way. One feels like reading a new story. That’s the beauty of Manoj Das’s writing. His language is magical and touches the reader’s sensibilities.

Keeping the target reader in mind, Manoj Das is quite particular about using appropriate language to convey his ideas with intensity. Manoj Das is an enchanting story teller. We are simply mesmerized with his depiction of the reality with such perfection as common readers. The narrative in target language at times excels so well that one feels as if they are even better than the source language. In many a place Manoj Das takes the liberty of using colloquial

expressions that definitely appeal to the common sensibilities of the native readers. I think being a bilingual writer that is the freedom a writer enjoys. The words and expressions convey the little nuisances of the specific languages retain their unique characteristic in their respective contexts. will be difficult to find an expression in SL.

Conclusion

Translation thus becomes a cultural phenomenon and involves the transplantation of the source text in the target culture to most extent. When there is a wide gap between the source culture and target culture, there are a number of problems and issues which are bound to surface. However, in case of Manoj Das that is different. He has got the perfect understanding of both the languages and cultures at the same time. So, transcreation obviously becomes an easy task for him. In the complex process of translating the texts and cultures, deleting and adding things here and there, nothing is lost in his translation. Rather, a lot is value addition is found in the writer's attempt to create something new and different. For Manoj Das they are not merely adaptations or recreations, they are just the same. The essence, culture, magic, mystery, folklores and philosophy are exactly presented as it is in the source text. It's a painless and conscious effort for the writer to do so. There are no differences or disconnect in his writings. There is a different order and great discipline in his writing which are rare to find among other modern translations. He beautifully explores human sensibilities, emotions, nature's serenity, cultural connotations of both the languages which make his appeal to the innermost sense of the readers. His understanding of the human psyche is brilliantly amazing and one wonders how can someone have such in-depth and profound understanding of human nature with its varied shades. In fact, he is one of the very few Indian writers of English language who have carved a niche for themselves in the arena of great literature which can never be replaced by the contemporary ordinary writings of our modern times. Manoj Das has created a different band of bilingual writings thereby setting a trend for innovation and modernity with great taste for literature of a different order which will continue to be there as a classic writing. He has been immortalized through his writings and ageless words. His narration is beyond any boundary. Whether we call him as a translator or a great bilingual author, he stands apart and makes his presence felt more in the contemporary literary world.

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