

An Interview with Udaya Narayana Singh

K. MANSI

Udaya Narayana Singh (hereafter UNS) is a world-renowned poet, linguist, essayist and translation theoretician. At present, U. N. Singh is the Dean of Faculty of Arts & Humanities, Amity University Haryana. U. N. Singh has authored 26 books in Bangla, Maithili and English, and published over 180 research papers besides editing 21 volumes and translating nine other books. For his tremendous academic contribution, U. N. Singh has been awarded various national and international awards.

K. Mansi (hereafter KM) is working as an Assistant Professor (French) at Amity School of Languages, Amity University Haryana. She is the Coordinator for French language and Quebec Studies program at Amity School of Languages.

KM: You are a distinguished linguist, an acknowledged poet-playwright, an eminent translator and a renowned scholar in the field of Applied Linguistics and Culture Studies. You have held high profile administrative posts in various prestigious organizations like Visva-Bharati, Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), University of Hyderabad, University of Delhi – to name a few, where you established translation related projects like National Translation Mission and Anukriti (at CIIL), National Testing Service and Linguistic Data Consortium (at CIIL), and Centre for Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies (University of Hyderabad). It was your vision to make translation, especially translation of knowledge texts into various Indian languages, a national mission. What was the motive behind such a vision? Please tell us something about the background of NTM.

UNS: The context of ‘National Translation Mission’ or NTM has to be understood in terms of former Indian Prime Minister

Manmohan Singh's idea of several other missions like 'National Library Mission', as part of whole set of working fora under the guidance of Sam Pitroda. You may recall that 'National Knowledge Commission' (NKC) was set up at that particular time and Translation was one of its 10 or 12 focus areas, such as Knowledge Applications in Agriculture, Health Information Network etc. The interested can look up the NKC Report 2006-2009. Jayati Ghosh, a well-known academician from Jawaharlal Nehru University, who was also one of the members of the NKC approached me based on the inputs from other sources to act as a key person who could start thinking what nation could do about translation. When I looked at the statement of Manmohan Singh, I found that he had this dream of making translation as an important industry. The point that was in our discussion with NKC was: 'Can there be a Translation industry?' We know that Foreign Language translation has been there in India for long time – especially in the business and industry, and that there are many who join various universities to learn foreign languages so that they could find employment in various companies and even in government set-up as translators. But the question is "Can this become an industry on a large scale" so that a large chunk of advanced knowledge could percolate down to our languages? The idea was that this percolation would have twin effect: Enrich our Indian languages, which would then find newer domains of use, and draw up a large number of talented young people in to science, and technology research who might have been educated through regional languages medium. The second question was this: Although there are a lot of knowledge texts in India which have never reached the West, this would be a time to alter the situation. The translation traffic should flow both ways. There was a time when people looked at India as an enigma, and "discovered Sanskrit" and the knowledge it has produced long ago. But the fact is that in

the Indian context the tradition of such knowledge text production has been a continuous process. And it is also the case that many of these knowledge texts are so original that they had nothing to do with the Western debates going on. Some of the more modern Indian texts are a reflection of Western theoretical endeavors. Yet, some of these may also have been making interesting additions and contributions to the western discourse. Some may, of course, be derivatives but many of these knowledge discussions are not derivatives at all. They are true to the context of India or Indian literature, sciences and other Indian concerns. Therefore, these can be made available in the Western languages translation. Thus, this was another question he had raised.

Also, as soon as an important discovery is made and a paper is published abroad we see, if a paper is published in a foreign language like Russian, immediately English, French and German translations are made available. Similarly if a paper is published in French, English, German and Russian translations are available. Something like that can be done in Indian context. The idea was knowledge, how facilitation of knowledge text transfer can take place. The other important point was, there are many translational tools required for making such large-scale translations possible, such as Translators' Dictionary, Subject Special Technical Glossary, or Thesauri, or some small devices to facilitate the translators, like machine-aided tools. All these could also be a part of the activities of National translation mission. We started thinking in these terms.

Although we did not eliminate literary translation at all because a lot of knowledge is actually reflected, preserved, continued and propagated through creative writing, we did float yet another project – jointly with Sahitya Akademi, titled 'Katha Bharati' under which so many titles were eventually

published by the Akademi jointly with CIIL. You might have noticed that many of our creative writers have been talking about such times and spaces on which nothing else was available. No historical evidence is available till date. This has been happening since time immemorial, because even our epics such as the *Mahabharata* are only a collection of such tales. Therefore, literary text cannot be completely excluded from the domain of 'Knowledge texts'. So we thought we would sit down and draft out a base document for National translation mission. That was the time when I actually engaged my friend and fellow author-translator, K. Sachidanandan, the former Secretary of Sahitya Akademi (who was also the former editor of Indian Literature journal – the most important literary translation journal in India), as consultant before we drafted out the final version of Translation Mission document. That is how the whole documentation process began.

I always had this idea of doing something on a large scale for translation ever since 1986 document from the Ministry of Education, which talked about the New Education Policy. There was a whole page on translation in this document, thanks to P. V. Narsimha Rao (the then Minister of HRD) who was also a well-known translation theoretician and in a way a linguist with working knowledge of 17 plus languages. He later went on to become the Prime Minister of India in 1991. His idea was also similar to ours, namely, that there should be a full-fledged discipline of Translation Studies within the University Grants Commission (UGC) network in Indian universities, which was missing at that time. Thus it so happened that from 1986 onwards, I was chosen to set up the Centre for Translation in the University of Hyderabad, because the decision at government level was that one of the central universities would be given all the necessary manpower as well as money to set up the national center of translation. That is how I ended up shifting from the University of Delhi to the

University of Hyderabad (HCU) to design and establish this centre. I considered this to be a much-needed task and a great opportunity. Fortunately, Bh. Krishnamurti was the Vice Chancellor of HCU at that time. Popularly known in the academic circle as “BhK”, he has been in linguistics and literature both. He was a Professor of Telugu literature and language who joined Ph.D. program in linguistics in the USA, did his post-doc, and published in the best possible places. He has now passed away but he was indeed the most eminent linguist of India at that time. He was also a literary critic and translation studies person. He reposed this faith in me and gave a completely free hand. I thought I would set it up easily but there was also a problem. On the one hand you have the discipline of ‘Comparative Literature’ under which translation was taught those days, on the other hand, you had the discipline of ‘Linguistics’ under which some departments had courses on translation and lexicography. Both these discipline actually overlap with translation studies. So I had proposed in the University of Hyderabad to establish “Centre for Applied Linguistics, Translation Studies and Comparative Literature” together. Later on, in the Academic Council of the university, it was decided that although Comparative Literature did talk about translation studies, but its point of view or concerns on translation are different, and also that at the University of Hyderabad, there ought to be a separate centre for CL as well. Further, the discipline of Applied Linguistics would gel well with Translation Studies because there were so many aspects of translation, such as Lexicography, Machine Translation, and Interpretation, or even Inter-Semiotic Transfers usually taught within Applied Linguistics that could be related to Translation Studies. Therefore, we established different centers, one “Centre for Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies” (CALTS) and another one called the “Centre for Comparative Literature” (CCL). There were some common courses in

Translation Studies. The CCL was designed by me and S. Nagarajan. Initially, at CALTS, we started with two Ph.D. programs – in Applied Linguistics and also in Translation Studies, but later on – after the PhD and M.Phil. programmes got established, we also created a “PG diploma in Translation Studies”. Later, these diploma courses with their modules were bought over under the NTM. So, that is how the whole thing got started, from much earlier days. I hope the motive behind this mission is clearer now.

KM: “My philosophy aspires for a feeling, neither stated nor translated as yet” is what you believe in. From being a linguist and a poet to being a translator, how far this philosophy of yours fits in?

UNS: (Lughter!) This is not fair. You have picked up a line from my poem to frame this question. A poet is not necessarily the best person to be a translator of her or his own poetic lines. I don't know how this will relate to this particular Maithili text that I wrote in my 1986-anthology. The deep essence of this line, here, is that there are areas in our belief system, which cannot be transposed into another culture. The belief system of a poet or an author or a writer is quite rooted in one's own culture. Taking it out from that culture and making it bloom into another culture, which is what a translator does, is not easy, nor is it quite often feasible. A text can be modified, and there can be a *bhashantaran* (भाषांतरण) of the text but this language transfer (of the text) is not merely transferring the form of the text from one language to another person's cultural expression system, or language. It does not make it possible for all the philosophical aspects of the text to be taken care of in the recipient language. Sometimes that is possible, perhaps if languages are genetically related or genealogically related, or at least culturally related, i.e. when two languages sharing the same cultural spaces. For example, languages of former

Yugoslavia, Croatia and Serbia were sharing the same cultural spaces, which gave rise to a greater degree of translatability between them. Another example may be from Pashtu to Uzbek because of shared cultural geography. In the Indian context, Assemese to Bangla, Telgu to Kannada could provide such instances. Lot of philosophical give and take has occurred between these pairs. But these are exceptions. When you are talking about transposing the philosophy into completely unknown language and unrelated languages, that makes it difficult. That's what I wanted to say here.

KM: You are a poet as well as a translator of poems. What is your take on 'Poetry is lost in translation'? Secondly, do you feel that 'untranslatibility' exists or is it a misrepresentation?

UNS: The question of losses in translation sounds to me, like a businessperson talking in terms of loss and gain. Can we talk about translation being a profit or a loss business? It is very difficult to say. It is like giving up the body's structure and entering another body structure and becoming something or somebody else, a Yayati. That something else may not behave in the same manner as the person from whose body the soul has moved out. Therefore, from this what would result cannot be anybody's guess, because no one can really predict. It can be more acceptable or less acceptable; it can be more enjoyable or less enjoyable. I really don't know if one should talk about such losses or gains in translation. This is my take on it. I really don't know. It sounds good both in the film and in theory but I don't know how far we could go about discussing these issues.

As far as the second question about "untranslatability", frankly, I don't know, and I have not faced a text that is completely untranslatable. If everything can be translated into another language then there is no purpose of writing in different languages. Then we can all agree in United Nations to

forget about all other languages and write in only one language since everything can be translated. But that does not happen because there are certain texts which are imbued into certain languages and cultures so much so that they cannot be disentangled from their languages and cultures of origin. Yes, there is lot of facilitation in transferring which has happened because of immensely powerful tools created by lexicographers. There are very good tools that have come about, many interpretations of same text have also happened. In this context, the knowledge texts are particularly easier to decipher as compared with literary texts, which are more difficult as each one can have so many interpretations. What is available in one interpretation is “absent” or is “lost” in another interpretation. Which one is real will be often difficult to say. So, impossibility of translation or untranslatability is not the real crux of the problem. Yes lot of it is translated today and lot more can be translated. Yet, not everything is possible to transfer without making compromises with the essence of original or without losing the shine of original or in comparison with the acceptability of the original, or its intended ambiguity. While translating you can actually interpret or you can make it easier but translating with all the senses intact, with all the multiple ambiguities intact, all the references intact is not easy because a lot of things being referred into the source language may not be available in the corresponding language, or it could be that they are very redundant in the target language. Well you may make them available, and there can be a whole book or dissertation or dictionary on it, but by the time they are popular and people read these translations, it will take time. For example, in the Greek tradition, there are different set of Gods and Goddesses who do not behave in the way our Gods and Goddess behave. So, if the Greek text is translated into our language we need to recontextualize, or you will need to train our reader in India in

Greek mythology so that they are able to appreciate what is happening in these texts. Therefore, there are intrinsic problems. It is just like imposing American presidential system on Indian (parliamentary) political system. Perhaps it may fit but we do not know.

KM: Generally, translation is defined as ‘transfer’ of meaning, sense, or information from one language to another. Do you agree with this definition? Do you really think there is a ‘transfer’?

UNS: There is an element of transfer. Not everything can be transferred. The attempt is made by the translators to transfer but it is not exactly the transference of everything. There cannot be wholesale transfer. What we mean by the term ‘transfer of officials’ from one place to another can be a good metaphor here. You can actually theoretically transfer one official from one ministry to another or from one place to another, but you may notice that the person, who may have been effective in one place, may not be effective in another. While transference is purely an official decision in such cases, the result of transfer (in this case, translation) may not be as appreciable as in case of the actual transfer of meaning or sense of the text. Because you try to transfer a meaning assuming that particular meaning and concept is available in both languages. But if not, it has to be created in one of them, the whole category has to be created. Then a mere transfer will not work because what you do then is that you choose an equivalent, a near equivalent but that near equivalent may not represent all the semantic features. So that becomes a problem. So this definition is both good and bad, right and wrong at the same time. It is not a full proof definition of translation.

KM: What is your definition of translation?

UNS: I don’t think translation can really be defined. What is the definition of mind? Somebody may ask a philosopher, how

do you define mind? It is not easy for a psychologist or a philosopher to define their prime area of investigation: 'Mind'. 'Translation' is so basic that it decries all attempts to define it in precise terms. There is one interesting thing about this act: You will notice that translation has not emerged. Many people think translation is an activity, which has emerged only in the recent times. I would say that translation has been one of the most important and original ways of looking at sense, looking at lines, looking at sentences, looking at texts right from the beginning of humankind. I have a paper named "In Other Words" where I have explained that even within the same language we are restating our sentences all the time – especially if somebody does not understand my words because my level of statement may not match the recipient's level of understanding the same statement. The recipient may not have the right kind of background to understand what I am saying. So, I might have to restate; or say in other words. This is one of the basic fundamental activities of human communication from the beginning. I would say that 'translation' is one of the important features which Charles Hockett has missed out during his Design Features of Human Language. It has been there in our speech right from the beginning. It is and should be a part of defining what a speech is. Except that I can always say that I am using vocal-auditory channel but it has also been demonstrated that there are people who are not able to speak because they are differently abled, either dumb and deaf, yet they come up with the excellent propositions/texts in writing. That means if you have another channel of communication, you can win over the speech channel, the spoken channel, and come up with several ways of saying the same thing. So it is not the speech or the "spoken word" that is important. Language is beyond speech, beyond writing. So, that is the interesting thing about the human language which is one of the defining features of human beings.

I would say translation is an equally important feature of what makes us “human beings”. Anybody speaking in any language can speak in other words; can interpret his sentence with different set of words in any other language, or in the same language. It means people in all societies are natural translators. When you do that between two languages, it attracts attention. That is what we are talking about in different translation theories. Therefore, ‘Translation’ may be easy to describe but is difficult to define.

KM: A true polyglot, who has not only mastered his ‘mother-tongue’ (Bangla) and his ‘father-tongue’ (Maithili), but has also translated between these two language pairs, apart from English – that’s what you are. What motivated you to translate within or between Indian languages when you had the option to translate from other European languages (primarily English) into Indian languages, and vice-versa?

UNS: No, I have translated from English and French into Maithili and Bangla both. I have also translated among various Indian languages. The reason for preferring translating from IL-to-IL, or from Indian languages into other Indian languages is that these tasks are ‘doable’ because of the common cultural features. That is the only reason. Otherwise, you are always tempted to bring out some well know English text or through English some Russian, German, or French texts into your language. There are many intermediary languages. In India Hindi is fast becoming an intermediary language even within our own Indian languages. Because in India there are Dravidian languages and Aryan languages, which are quite apart but quite often, they are mediated by Hindi. But then it all depends who has translated it from, say for example from Telugu to Hindi and how good his Telugu or Hindi was and how good the result has been. For example, take the instance of a task of translation of *Kavisekhara* Guruzada Apparao and

his plays in Bangla. Translating Gurazada Venkata Apparao's '*Kanyasulkam*' (1892), given his dialectal background and Telugu styles which are not standard Telugu, the task will not be easy. Then you must have corresponding Bangla stylistic variation away from the standard Bangla to be able to do justice. So, this is the problem. The matter is not easy but yet it is still easier than doing it into English. In English I would have perhaps done with my inadequate knowledge of Cockney but I will not know whether that will be a correct decision while transferring the sense of such dialectal texts. So if you get to do it in Hindi, which variety of Hindi will you pick up? It is not easy to decide if you would like to choose the 'Bazaar Hindoosthani' of Suniti Kumar Chatterji, where Hindi and Marathi get enmeshed. There are many decisions like that which can still be difficult but it is easier than doing it between one European language into another. That is the reason why I emphasized on translating from Indian languages to Indian languages.

KM: Can you throw some light on the traffic of translation in Indian context. Which way is it going according to you?

UNS: In the Indian context, if you clearly go by the statistics, any standard Indian library of Hindi would have half the books written in original Hindi, and the other half would be translations. Perhaps, Hindi has the largest number of the translated books. The reason is simple: In comparison to other languages, translations into Hindi sell more. It is a much bigger market. People would like to know more about what is going on in other languages and cultural spaces but there are no means to know, except for reading translations into English and Hindi. Since a lot of people know Hindi because of various reasons, this is bound to happen. First, Hindi is being spoken in eleven states so that is a very wide market area for publishers to explore. Second, there are always people who are

bilingual outside the core Hindi belt so that becomes a further attraction for the publisher. However, I would still say that there are two or three other Indian languages, which are catching up very well with Hindi; in particular, Malayalam is an example. Anything which is controversial, which is useful and which is being discussed in media, or which may be selling very well elsewhere, I am not talking about the media in Kerala, but media in West Bengal or Maharashtra, it catches the attention of the Malayali translators and you have this book immediately available in Malayalam. In fact, I was once invited by the coveted poet-translator, Ayyappa Paniker, a well-known translation theoretician himself to read out my translated poetry in Thrissur organized by the Kerala Sahitya Academy in the 1990s. On the margins of this poetry reading festival, they had also organized a translation exhibition. He took me to the exhibition and showed me that there were so many of books translated from Bangla to Malayalam. He asked then: “But do you think you have translated so much from Malayalam into Bangla?” I was so ashamed. The truth is that we have not done it in Bangla. So these languages have their biases. In Bangla, lots of works have been translated from the European languages; not from Indian languages. It is not because that Bangla do not think about Indian languages but it is because of the market. Kolkata Book Fair is one of the biggest book marketing exercises in West Bengal. They have the biggest sales point for the Spanish, French or German authors into Bangla. But translating a well-known Hindi author about whom there have not been much discussions in the regional media or among creative writing circles in Kolkata and Dhaka, it would be difficult to find their books on the shelves here. Hence, that kind of translation is not taking place. So I will say Marathi, Malayalam and Bangla are catching up but Hindi has been doing better than all these three. It all depends on the size of the market.

KM: How do you identify yourself, a theoretician of translation or a practitioner of translation?

UNS: Both. I started as a literary theorist and a practitioner of translation in mid-1960s but when the chance came about twenty years later to set up whole center for Translation Studies, I started picking up translation theories and looking at the debates in translation. To my surprise, I realized that I had been missing out a lot by not reading up these interesting debates. Although a lot of people say that you don't need to know theories of translation to be able to function as a good translator, it is actually true. A good translator, according to me, is an accident. Good translators are also a product of complex intercultural situations. This is because translation is an act, which can be perfected with more exposure and experience. Take, for example, the case of cricket. You don't need a theory of cricket to be able to be a good batsman. It is an act; either you are a good batsman or a bad one. But then there is no harm in knowing about the theory of cricket or about its history or about field placements and bowling strategies used by earlier cricketers, because then you will be a good leader. You can teach others what to do in a difficult situation, or in difficult pitch condition, or what happened earlier. So, theory can always help but as for myself I began as practitioner and developed my theoretical interest and acumen later. At this point of time, however, it is difficult to divide myself and say if I am a theoretician or a practitioner. I keep on publishing. In last five years I have published three very major works in translation myself. One from Maithili into Bangla³⁴, one from Kannada into Maithili³⁵ and one from

³⁴ 2013. *Dhvase Jay Shanti Stup* (Translated from Maithili) Sahitya Akademi.

³⁵ 2017. *Vachana – Maithili translation of 2500 Vachanas from Kannada*.

Bangla into English³⁶. So you see here various pairs of languages are being talked about.

KM: Can you please elaborate about your recent work on translation, which you just mentioned?

UNS: These include the following:

2013. *Dhvase Jay Shanti Stup* (Translated from Maithili into Bangla; Keertinarayan Mishra's poems); Kolkata: Sahitya Akademi.

2017. *Vachana – Maithili translation of 2500 Vachanas from Kannada*. Bangalore: Basava Samithi. Co-translated with 10 other Maithili poets.

2013/16. *The Other Gitanjali*. Andorra: AnimaViva multilingüe SL, Escaldes – Engordany, Principat d'Andorra [www.animaviva-publisher.com]. ISBN 978-99920-68-26-7; E-Book: ISBN 978-99920-68-24-3 2016c, Indian Edition. *The Original Gitanjali*. Kolkata: E-Lekhan & AnimaViva multilingüe.

KM: What do you think about theories of translation? While translating in different language pair, do you apply the same theories? Based on your experience, do you think there is any one translation theory that can be applicable across language and culture?

UNS: As a critical theory cannot take precedence over creative writing, the same thing applies to Poetics and Poetry-writing. The theory of poetry can only follow the poets. As students of literature, critics look at how the poets, novelists and authors create, and then set up their theoretical framework because no novelist will read the theory first and start writing. That's not possible. Similarly, a translator will not read theory and then start translation. But we need is to teach Translation Studies, to

³⁶ 2013/16. *The Other Gitanjali*.

do research in and on translation, and to look at the original text and original culture as I would say that the translation studies is a part of a much bigger project, namely Cultural Studies. So to that extent, Translation theory is relevant but not necessary for a practicing translator. Yes, a practicing translator can understand various possible strategies available, if the translator happens to be not a born grassroot bilingual in the two languages or is a translator who is slowly becoming a capable translator. You know there are people who are born poets and those who become a poet. Poetizing and penning poetry are different. Similarly, if large-scale translations are to be done you have to become the professional translator, and you will have to train many people into this act of translation. So people across streams, like medicine, engineering, sciences etc need to be trained as translators. Their services are required. So in a way, the leadership in Translation Studies must act like *Bhagirath*, to bring the Ganges of knowledge of different sciences into their own culture. Take for example, Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis, the founder of Indian Statistical Institute, who had given so much thought to the translation theories. S. N. Bose, the physicist, had talked so much about use of indigenous languages for science writing and teaching as a part of translation. This was so, because they wanted to have Indians thinking in Indian languages about Physics or Statistics. So that is altogether a difficult project, a different project altogether. There are many other reasons as to why Translation Studies must be taken up seriously, how it has to be done and should be done. But it is not always necessary for a practicing translator to be a Ph.D.s in translation studies before she begins to practice.

KM: since you have translated from different language pairs, from European languages to Indian languages and within Indian languages, can you highlight the most prominent problems and challenges any translator face? Can you also

suggest how to deal with such problems while undertaking the 'task of translator'?

UNS: There are three major problems, first, the problem of equivalence. How do you find the exact equivalent, or even near equivalent? It is not an easy task. There are many theories of equivalence. Second, the problem of cultural connects or disconnect between the original and the resultant texts. It is almost like a Sacchidanandan-poem where he writes:

*“Poetry translation is
the embarrassing head-
transposal of the Vikramaditya tales.
The translator
supports another poet's
head on his trunk.”* (Tr. by Ramakrishnan, E.V. 1984.)³⁷

It is as if you have to fit the head of one onto the head of another. It should not become a Ganesh syndrome, if you are not finding the right head, put the elephant's head. Third, authors play a game. Words and authors are good in playing a game. They are ever creative and they keep on experimenting with meanings and their carriers, i.e. words. To match that creativity in another language is a challenge. It can be matched by an equally great poet or author in the other language, and not by an average or mundane translator who has been paid rupees per page to translate it. When Ramdhari Singh Dinkar translates Tagore in Hindi, it seems as good as the original in Bangla. Not everybody can do this. There are 45 or more translations of Tagore's Geetanjali in Hindi but not all are as good as that of Dinkar's translation of Tagore's poems. When the poet-laureate Andre Gide translates Tagore in French, it becomes very different. So, you have to be equally great poet

³⁷ 'Poetry Translation.' Translation of K. Satchidanandan's Malayalam poem. *Chandrabhaaga* II, Vol. 11: 39-40.

to be able to translate. This is the problem. Tagore translated Kabir Das into Bangla, and it was very good. But it may not always be the case.

KM: You have done lot of work on Tagore. Do you think as a poet he is exalted in English? He himself has confessed that while translating himself, he always remained target-oriented. In doing so, do you think he has not been faithful to his own creation and somewhere diminished its value? Should a translator be target-language oriented?

UNS: Yes, I think Tagore made a lot of compromises. His compromise was prompted from his target-orientation. You are right about that. In my own translation of Tagore, in the book 'The Original Gitanjali' with a translation of 157 poems, you cannot compare 104 of them, as they were never done attempted by Tagore. He did not render his 1910-Gitanjali into English. But 53 of them were picked up by Tagore for his English version along with 50 others from other anthologies. But you can easily compare my translation of those 53 and his rendering. My translation focused on the original but his was focusing on the readership. What readers would like to read was important for him. That is a strategy quite often, but that is the prerogative of the poet-translator who translates his/her own poem. I am no one to criticize him but I would never do it for my poems. I can only say that.

When I have translated my poems into English or when they have gone into German or some other languages like Tamil, they remained as close to the original as possible. I will give you an incidence when I met a German translation specialist during the inauguration of German version of my poems in Bonn. I met with a group of 40 different translators and theoreticians and German Translators' Association personnel. I was surprised to know that some of them remembered my lines in German and quoted from memory. I said this is about a rural

landscape in Mithila; how is it that you like this poem more than the others do? I thought you would like the urban kind of poems and feeling more than this culturally imbued text. They said no, our village set up reflects quite well into the original, and therefore, these poems have also come up very well in German.

So sometimes even without compromise, you can achieve. As for Tagore, he was somebody who was always willing to shift from one version of his play to another more than a times, if need be, or from shift from one building to another. He had five buildings built during his lifetime (Udayan, Pratichi, Shyamali, Punascha, etc) in the Rabindra Bhavana complex, never satisfied with one building. If you look at his plays, same plays have 13 versions, and his poetry pages are full of changes and criss-crosses. Bangladeshi poet Jasimuddin, student of Shantiniketan and close to Tagore, said even before going on to stage, Tagore as director would say could I change your dialogue? So, if you talk about faithfulness, he is not faithful to his own texts. Depending upon his target audience, he would modify his texts. He has been doing it not just because of the translation, but also as a matter of strategy. So, if you look at the Vichitra website, run by Jadavpur University, 13 different windows of the same play will come up; each window highlighting the changed text. This is the special feature of Tagore. He has been constantly modifying himself, changing himself. May be if he is asked to do it again, he will do it in a different way. I think that is a strategy. That is why when Satyajit Ray translated Tagore's stories into film; he takes the liberty, which Tagore would have taken. But the result is fantastic. If he would have stuck to the Tagore's style of writing, the result would have been disastrous. So this is a very peculiar situation. You don't know. The creative mind decides how the resultant text must be done.

KM: To what extent should we prejudge our audience?

UNS: It can only work on the basis of our intuitions.

KM: Does it have the same result? Does it click every time?

UNS: Not necessarily. It might not click every time. Some of his translations are outrightly bad. He misjudged the audience. He is not successful everywhere. Some places he been successful but the strategy he has used have not led to success everywhere. What he does at the age of 50 and what he does at the age of 70 when time has changed are not the same as by 1930s, the parameters had also changed. In addition, by 1916 the entire poetic diction in Bangla had changed. There is a big shift from archaic style (Saadhu) to the modern colloquial (Calit) style, thanks to Pramatha Choudhary and the whole group of authors called the '*Kallol*' group of poets. The advice given by Budhhadev Bose, a well-known expert on Tagore himself, to his fellow poet was that do they should not read Tagore at all – to come out of his influences. Write independently, think independently, and do not be blinded by the aura of Tagore – was his advice. There were other creative authors who came up in our cultural scenario differently. So, Tagore cannot be invincible always. He cannot always be successful. As a translator, he had his own limitations.

KM: The traditional translation talks about the concept of fidelity for the source text and there has been a long debate on politics of translation and whether one should translate faithfully or freely. What is your advice, a translator should be faithful to original text or the target audience? Where should his/her faithfulness lie?

UNS: This has been a major debate in China as well. If you look at ancient Chinese translation theories, you will find faithfulness vs beauty have been major concerns for them as well. I would say that translators should not start as Fitzgerald

did. His take was an extreme position, namely, that Persians did not know how to write poetry and he would teach them. So, in his translation of Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat* he would do the real Omar Khayyam. Fitzgerald wanted to better Omar Khayyam. That is a wrong strategy. Although, his translation happened to be very good but not necessarily better than the original Persian text in comparison. I would not say that original text is sacrosanct as there will be a necessity to tweak it a bit when you are taking it to another culture.

Same is the case when you are taking the literary text into media. The language of television and film is very different from the language of literature. That conditions of the other language forces you to rethink and reorder the element, which might completely change the order of the event sometimes. There is a theory of the real time and the apparent time in fictional analysis; this theory talks about the real time of the event and how does the author manipulate it. The filmmaker manipulates it in a completely different way. So I would say original is very important, bring as much emphasis and focus on original as much as possible but depending on what you are doing and where you are taking it, for what purpose you are translating it, you may have to make changes, compromises, modifications etc. Nothing is a crime. If you look at Aijaz Ahmed's experiment, a group of 25 American poets looked at Ghalib's work. The rendering was done in 25 different ways. The way Adrienne Rich translated, Thomas Fitzimmones or others will not translate it that way. It could be different interpretations altogether. It is possible to have multiple good translations. How you will go about is a call taken by the translators and a good translator will always do that.

KM: Do you believe that there is a good or bad translation or wrong or right translation?

UNS: Not right or wrong translation but yes there are certainly good and bad translations. Who is right and who is wrong is an endless argumentation but good and bad will always be there. You are easily read and find out how good a translation has come about.

KM: What according to you are the competencies that a good translator must possess?

UNS: Well, I would say that it is very complicated task. Because, it is almost like a cubist painting: You dismantle the original shape and when you reassemble, it becomes a very different entity. It is not easy to say how one should do it but yes, there is a lot of intuition, which works in these renderings. At each point it is like a many different lanes that are open, many choices would be there. Moreover, depending on what choice you make, it will take your text to a different alley. Translation functions in that way. I have done multiple translations of the same text just for practice to see what happens if I take this route and what the result is if I take another route. It turned out that both are good but not comparable. So it is possible to use a Group translation method here which is one of the many ways to do this. Sometimes this method takes care of many things. For example, Shankha Ghosh has done Ghalib translation with about 20 different poets. They sat in a group, exchanged notes and modified accordingly. So, this method was different from what others have done and when the book came all the 20 names were there as each one of them have contributed to other's translation in some way. The group translation is a very complicated task.

KM: Translation Studies has emerged as a new discipline, which most agree, in 1976 at a colloquium at Leuven, Belgium. The translation theories have also been influenced by the contemporary explosion in literary theory, like

postmodernism, post-structuralism, post-colonialisms. Can you underline major revolution in this field in Indian context?

UNS: The major contribution of the Indians engaged in translation and creative writing has been to position a translator on par with an author because transmigration of texts, legends, stories, fables, and myths have been a part of ‘authoring’ in all our languages for a long time. *Kambaramayna* or *Ramcharit-Manas* by Tulsi Das, or three hundred other Ramayana texts are an example of what I am saying. The same thing happened with many other texts and epics. The literary theories you point out are western theories the influence of which on Indian theories of translation is yet to be assessed. In future, when someone evaluates contribution of some of us practicing this theory-building now that the discipline of ‘Translation Studies’ made a beginning in Indian universities since the mid-‘80s, the comments will perhaps show where we stand.

KM: In your book, *Translation as Growth*, you assert all original literary work is translation and all translation, original creation. Kindly elaborate as many may get confused with the superficially contrary nature of the statement.

UNS: The second part of this comment, namely, all translations are like original works of literary art flows from the tacitly accepted position on ‘translation’ and ‘transcreation’ as I have argued in reply to the earlier question. However, the first part of the statement in my book, namely, that all creative writing is – in fact, twice-removed, and is a ‘translation’ of the ‘mental’ or the ‘logical text’ that an author has somewhere in his consciousness is a stand I sincerely believe in. That also explains the statements we often hear from some writers and poets, namely, that she/he had been trying to write the same fiction again and again in all his novels, or penning the same poem again and again. That poet-critics like Octavio Paz

K. Mansi

would also be thinking independently in the same way is not a surprise to me.

KM: Can you please elaborate on “Translativity model” as the fastest way of language development?

UNS: This is fairly simple, if we follow the processes of ‘standardization’ of new literary languages. They would have a number of ‘successful’ models before them as to how Bangla or Hindi languages/literature progressed over a period of time to arrive at their current literary standards. If we insist that the new languages must also go through a few hundred years of trial and error, and then achieve what they require to do as early as possible, that may be unfair. Instead, they may follow the ‘Translativity’ model and see which of the routes, or moves, or decisions match with the genius of their own language, and adopt them or a combination of them as a matter of strategy of standardization.

KM: Sooner the translation is naturalized, faster the language will grow. Please comment.

UNS: Some theoreticians believe that a translation does and must look different from the original writings of the target language, whereas some of us believe that an all out attempt must be made of the translators to see that the resultant text looks and reads like an original text – for which some compromises and changes or deletions and additions may have to be done so that they are ‘naturalised’. If that is possible to do, and we are aware that it may not be possible or profitable, or even desirable, to do that all the time, the effect should be positive.

KM: Only tool to keep a text away from destruction is translation. Translation can save text from destruction. Can you cite some examples?

UNS: Let me give you a concrete example. There was an important regional epic: ‘Kanchi-Kaberi Kavya’, an epic in Odia and Telugu, based on a local legend not very well-remembered (See Sen, Sukumar & Sunanda Sen. 1958. ‘*Kanchi-Kaberi Kavya*,’ Kolkata: University of Calcutta). This one was preserved in the Jagannath Temple archives as a part of *Madala Panji* – authored by the Karana-Caste writers of Puri. In translation, the text became popular in Bengal. It was transcreated by the 19th Century scholar-poet, Rangalal Bandyopadhyay - who is considered to be the pioneering modernist. Thus, the text lived on in South Bengal, in the adjacent areas of Odisha. The story is of the period of the King Kapilendra Deva (1435-1470) who had won over Kanchi in the south, but had lost much of it which his son, King Purushottam Deva (1470-1497) had won over again after he defeated the King of Vijayanagara in 1480. The Karnata King as shown in the literary text is perhaps Salur (sic? Saluva?) Narasimha, whose daughter Padmavati or as known as Rupambika in some Telugu manuscript is the heroine in this kavya. Similarly, survival of a few Charyapada (9th Century AD) songs of oldest Bangla specimen in Tibetan version is another case.

KM: We have heard you say that the ‘Mithila region’ and its language, culture and society have not been properly explored by scholars. Could you elaborate?

UNS: We have very little scholarship in the economic and cultural historiography of Mithila. That is a fact. Attempts have been made to publish books on linguistic histories or literary histories, although many of them are biased to some extent as they allot very little space for the subaltern texts, such as ‘Naika Banijara’ or ‘Raja Salhes’. Further, any study on Mithila Region must also consider the entire cultural space including the then Bengal, Nepal and Odisha, if not also

K. Mansi

Assam and Nepal – to make a complete sense of the Regional Studies.

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