

Kavya and Anuvad in the Age of Bhasha: Reading History of Bangla Literature

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Abstract

This essay discusses translation as the primary factor in the creation of Indian literature in general and Bangla literature in the medieval period. The term "translation" that was used to describe the accommodation of numerous literatures after reception, adaption, influence, and translation in mediaeval Bangla was liberal. We discover several facets and definitions of translation while reading mediaeval Bangla literature, despite the word translation not being used. However, identical actions took place while disguising them as resistance and social welfare. This study does not investigate the original mediaeval texts; instead, it surveys Bangla-language literary histories of Bangla literature and traces how the literary historian(s) viewed the process of mediaeval translation. In order to support the idea of the Indian school of translation, this study incorporated diverse objectives, strategies, and conceptions of the poets involved in translating a book from Sanskrit, Persian, or any other language into Bangla. The focus of this essay is on issues like the origin of language, linguistic and cultural identity, resistance, and the function of translation in relation to all these elements. It also reads mediaeval translation as a component of a larger literary, political, and cultural system.

Keywords: Anuvad, Bhasha, Payar, Lokabhasha, Devabhasha, Desh, Bengali Translation, Indian Translation Theory, Translation as Resistance.

Introduction

The modern Bengali or Bangla language was not known by its name during the Middle Ages. It was only known as "bhasha"

(language). Since Fort William College and other colonial institutions began with their academic interventions in various parts of India, the mediaeval term "bhasha" that was then used to refer to Bangla, began to be popularly identified as Bangla. Since the "Bengali" identity of the language was absent, many poets in mediaeval Bengal translated Sanskrit works into the bhasha but did not refer to the result work as Bengali. During that period, the geo-cultural area that became known as Bangla or Banga was split up into many parts like Banga, Goud, Barendra, Rarh, etc. As opposed to the "Deva-Bhasha," which is Sanskrit, mediaeval poets and translators referred to their literary language as "Desi-Bhasha" or "Loka-Bhasha"⁴⁰ (Naskar 225).

Even translation was referred to as writing or composing. Moreover, in mediaeval Bengal, the activity presently referred to as translation or anuvad was never known by that name. All these translations might have been made for free with enough ingenuity on the part of the translators. All the translators were considered as authors in mediaeval Bengal. Writing, or what we now refer to as translating, was a democratization of knowledge that freed it from Sanskrit, which was incomprehensible to the ordinary people.

The translators' objective was to compose their texts for those who do not have access to knowledge, rasa, and theology in Sanskrit, Persian, or any other language. The translators wrote in the introduction of their Kavyas that they composed works

⁴⁰ Deshabhasha or Deshibhasha refers to the language of the ordinary people. As an opposite of Devabhasha, Sanskrit, Deshibhasha was the language today known as Bengali. It was also the spoken language of the ordinary people. A historian who subscribes to this idea is Asit Bandopadhyay. By 'popular history', I mean the subsequent writings that promote this idea. For example, there are numerous examples in Sanatkumar Naskar's "Madhyajuger Bangla Anubad Sahitya: Swarup, Patabhumi, Boichitra". (Naskar 225)

into bhasha, which came to be later known as Bangla (Bengali) because they wanted people's welfare. The Hindus heavily used the Sanskrit Mahakavyas, also known as the Itihasas, in their ceremonial, cultural, and religious events (Naskar 226). Therefore, the manuscripts⁴¹ and translation of the Mahakavyas and Itihasa kathas was a significant addition with new bhasha content. The practice of manuscript culture itself was a way to impart sacred text knowledge to common people.

The protest against the warning typically given in the society favouring the dominance of the Sanskrit language over other languages was expressed through the transcription of oral traditions and the translation of Sanskrit literature and Shastras into bhasha. The act of translating into bhasha was also a form of defiance against a caste's monopoly on "knowledge." It laid the foundation for the growth of bhasha both as a language and class identity. The cautionary tale is typically presented in a community where Sanskrit is preferred over other languages. In this era, the growth and development of translation were first for Desh and then for Loka, and knowledge produced in Deva Bhasha⁴² was translated and apparently 'stolen' from heaven for Desh and Loka. Translation practice of the era leads to the localisation of myth and knowledge confined within a particular class for centuries. The translation was indeed meant

⁴¹ I used the word manuscript to mean the writing, which is empowerment as scripted. As Maladhar Basu translated, collected and composed Krishna-Katha of the Bhagabata and from the available oral traditions for the people who could not afford the expenses of arranging Bhagabata performances. In general, translation in written form in the medieval period was empowering in offering texts for reading irrespective of castes. Once you have the manuscript, you do not need to wait for the Brahmin performers to read or perform it for you.

⁴² As Sheldon Pollock titled his book, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009. The language of god, which means the bhasha of the Deva, Deva bhasha.

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for Desh and Loka by feeding into it the knowledge of Devaloka, Devabhasha, and Deva Sahitya.

The history of continual translation from Sanskrit, Persian, and other languages contributed to the development of bhasha (Bangla as a literary language) in the mediaeval century. Such translation took place through a variety of performance traditions in addition to writing. A narrative of a certain important text, such as the Ramayana or the Mahabharata, may occasionally be formed by writing and performance working together. The Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Puranas, and the translation of Islamic and Persian texts are among the literary works that mediaeval translation is typically categorized as in Bengali literature by literary historians⁴³.

Translation: Sin and Saviour

Astadasha Puranani Ramasya Charitani Cha

Bhashay Manaba Shrutwa Rourab Narakang Brajet (Naskar 225)

(Eighteen Puranas as well as Rama tales

If the man listens in bhasha

Will be sent to the Rourab, the worst hell). [Translation Mine]

Although the historical accuracy of the lines above cannot be established, it is widely believed in historical discourses that the Brahmins who performed the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and various Purana from door to door were absolutely petrified of translation because they believed that doing so would lead to their loss of livelihood because it may provide many non-brahmin non-performers of the epics and other sacred narrative

⁴³ Finbarr Barry Flood called it "medieval multiculturalism" and pointed out that "the concept of multiculturalism fails to do justice to the complex and fluid notions of identity that characterise the highly mobile artisans, merchants and political elites..." (4)

traditions, access to the manuscripts of translation. Another rhymed warning, Keshe, Beshe, Deshe/Tin Sarbaneshe (as mentioned by Arjun Dev Sensarma), was also discovered in Bangla and it implies that these three people—Kashiram Das, who translated the Bengali Mahabharata, Krittibas Ojha, who translated the Bengali Ramayana, and Brindaban Das, who wrote Chaitanya Bhagbata—are damnation.

It may be interesting to note that Maladhar Basu, a Kayastha by caste—then regarded as a Shudra—created the first literary translation in Bengali translation history. In 1473, he started translating Srikrishna-Vijay, and he completed it in 1480. Maladhar Basu, also known as Gunraj Khan, may have worked with the support of the Nawab of Goud, Ruknuddin Barbak Shah, who bestowed this title upon him, according to Khagendranath Mitra, the editor of the Srikrishna-Vijay (Mitra, Khagendranath; iii).

Almost twenty poets from the Bengali, Assamese, and Odia languages have manuscripts of works on Krishna based on the Srimad Bhagwat, according to Mitra. Sankardeva of Assam, Jagannath Das of Odisa, and Raghunath Bhagbatacharya of Bengal are only a few of the well-known Bhagavata authors from various bhashas. "Bhagbat Artha Jata Payare Bandhiya/ Lok Nistarite Jay Panchali Rachiya/ Bhagbat Shunite Anek Artha Chahi/ Te-Karane Bhagbat Geetachhande Gahi,"(Naskar 225), ("All the ideas found in Bhagabata, I composed in Panchali (metre) to save the people/ As it is expensive to arrange the Bhagabata"), wrote Maladhar Basu to his readers. And this possibly became the cause for intense aversion towards literary translation for the Brahmins, or Kathak Thakurs. The translation of religious writings that are widely regarded as sacred by regular people must therefore not be written and read but rather performed, observed, and heard, according to popular narratives that exist in public life. The

reason for this is that the common person's social life is affected because translation itself and the culture surrounding it, were so organic and natural in the mediaeval age.

Arjundev Sensarma, a critic and scholar of medieval Bengali literature, emphasises the Smarta culture and the resistance of Maladhar Basu against it, while Basu was translating his Srikrishna-Vijay (201-202). To be more particular about the caste hegemony Sensarma located translation within the Smarta knowledge culture of Bengal. His study on the "Hindu Bangalir Kavyasamaj", engaged medieval translation within all the intellectual debates of medieval Bengal where significant conflicts have been observed between anuvad into bhasha and Smarta-Sanskriti. Sensarma also claimed that the patronisation of Muslim rulers of Bengal was responsible for the emergence of the translation of Puranas and Kavyas into bhasha (201).

For instance, Paragal Khan understood if he wanted to be famous or ensure the longevity of his name, he should encourage or patronise the poets to translate into bhasha. The poets and translators of this time were the mediators between the treasury of knowledge [in Sanskrit] to which the ordinary people had no access. The language understood only by pundits was translated to convey the meaning to ordinary people, and the translator's role was that of the interpreter.

Translation as Public Affair and Welfare

The most well-liked translation culture in mediaeval Bengal was influenced by the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. However, other patterns in the post-Chaitanyadev era also included translating Puranas, Bhagbata, and literature on the Krishna Leela. The entire narrative of bhasha culture was about resistance, not just against Brahmanism but also against the cultural milieu in which Sanskrit culture was concentrated. It was about the upheaval of the hegemony of Brahminic access to Sanskrit as well. Here, a few illustrations are

introduced to demonstrate how poets from various locations helped to shape the bhasha culture. One of them is by the 17th-century poet Dwija Haridas who wrote the following in his Panchali:

संस्कृत नाहं ब्रुवाम् साधारण जनैः । भाषा कथा कहं आमि तथरि कारणे ॥

ভাষাকথা কহি বীর না করছি হলো । হাথ দলিাে আগুনে না পোড়ো কৈন
বলো ॥ (Naskar 225)

[Common people do not understand Sanskrit/ Hence I narrate
in the bhasha

I tell it in bhasha; please do not ignore/ Fire always can burn
your hand] (Translation mine.)

Such prelude claims that the translation is a public affair and directed for general welfare too. Through such literary works, early translators wanted to engage people with literary culture. Translation into bhasha appeared as the most powerful medium for educating people in their language. The translation itself was a process of making people attached to literary texts/cultures.

And thus, translation creates more inclusive bridges between people and culture or religion. As described by different poets, as Dwija Haridas also mentioned, translating was a deep concern about society and affection for the people. The translation appeared not only as a creative literary work but also as an emotional task. Another such example comes from the poet Pitambar who wrote Nala Damayanti in 1544 under the patronage of king Samar Singh of Kamta. He wrote,

पुरानार्दां शास्त्रे षहे ररहस्य आह्य । पण्डतिे ब्रुवय मात्र अन्याे ना
ब्रुवय ॥

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একারণ শ্লোকভাঙ্গি সব বুবাবার । নজি দেশভাষা-বন্ধে রচয়ি
পয়ার।। (Naskar 225)

[The beauty of the Puranas / Understood by the scholars only/ I
write these slokas, so all understand / One must write in payar
of one's language] (Translation mine)

Amazingly, most poets in “Deshi-bhasha” (spoken language of
common people), or Bengali came to write literature to bridge
between the academic or literary and common people. This
self-appointed responsibility of educating typically shows
literature as activism and poets as socio-literary activists. We
can also find that translation in Deshabhasha or Deshibhasha
comes within the contact zones of the people, land, language,
culture, and knowledge. The third example I would like to
refer to is the order of Paragal Khan, ruler of Chattogram,
when he asked Srikar Nandi to translate. His instruction was:

সংস্কৃত ভারত না বুঝে সর্বজন । মের নবিদেন কছি শুন কবগিগ ।।

দেশীভাষে এই কথা করিয়া প্রচার । সঞ্চারউ কীর্তি মের জগ ভতির ।।
(Naskar 226)

[Everybody does not understand Sanskrit here/ please listen to
me, oh poets! /

Write literature in Desibhasha/ And let people know about my
contributions] (Translation mine)

The mediaeval royal administrators recognised literature as a
potent tool for mass communication and archiving. Since these
texts were cultural and religious jewels of the communities and
people passed down their knowledge of their contents orally
from generation to generation, many of them encouraged their
translation into bhasha. Therefore, bhasha literature may be the
most effective means of implanting their names in the
collective memory of the people.

Most translations were made in opposition to Brahminism and their use of Sanskrit, not to stop the spread of Islam. Desh was also being imagined while being translated into the indigenous tongue. The translation was done in Deshi bhasha. Poets and other authors realised that only via bhasha one could imagine Desh. As a result, these translations of the Bhagavata, Puranas, Ramayana, and Mahabharata proved to be helpful for the creation of the Desh and constructed the bhasha.

Translation and Formation of Bangaliyana (Bengaliness)

There is a regional division in the reception of Krittibas's Ramayana, which was more prevalent in southwest Bengal. On the other hand, Adbhut Acharya was popular in northeast Bengal. The regional representation and identity may have been reflected in different translations. Somewhere the culture of Goud was prominent, while elsewhere, the culture of north-east Bengal was prominent.

This is another significant finding that the translation of this era reflects, although the language is the same. Kalidas Ray wonders how Krittibas may remain the most famous translator of the Ramayana. He suggests that many translations written at different times appropriated the name of Krittibas, so he remained so widely and continuously popular (Bandopadhyay 53). It is also a fact that different kinds of performers, Kathak Thakurs (storyteller) and Pala Gayak⁴⁴ (musical performer) proved to be the symbiotic force in the culture of medieval translation practice. They adapted available texts of the Ramayana for performance and thus gave the Ramayana stories their universal appeal. This may be the reason for unidentified Ramayana stories to be found in folklife and the

⁴⁴ *Kathak Thakurs* were itinerant performers who narrate and sing the stories from *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. *Palagan* is an indigenous form of musical performance. The content of this performance are mainly stories from *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and other myths.

oral tradition. I suggest that this is also another significant finding of this era about translation. Through performance traditions, different poets of the medieval period contributed to creating folk Ramayanas. So, the translation of the Ramayana into a single manuscript appeared as an unidentified universal narrative of the folk or oral Ramayana.

Krittibas's translation of the Ramayana into Bengali (early 15th century) was in Panchali⁴⁵ form, perhaps the first generic type. "Krittibasi Ramayana," as it is popularly known, originally titled as ShriRam Panchali, gradually became part and parcel of Bengali culture. There are instances of its huge reception across the time in Bengali culture. The poetic genius of Krittibas was deeply rooted in the performance forms and traditions ingrained in the culture of Bengal. Translations into Panchali forms received a tremendous public response as these were also musical and were successfully adapted by the musical groups and performers. The text and its performance ensured the afterlife of these texts in public life—multiple rebirths in different mediums rooted these texts deeply in the Bengali culture.

However, Sukumar Sen was skeptical about the time of Krittibas and questioned earlier conjectures. Sen finds remarkable differences between the translations of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata in Bangla and holds that while Ramayana was translated in Panchali style meant mainly for singing, the Mahabharata, although claimed as Panchali, was meant primarily for reading. Since the Ramayana translation

⁴⁵ Panchali is an oral narrative that is either read to music or performed live with an instrument. This was frequently utilised in the creation of epic or long narrative poems. This form or metre was employed by numerous poets of the 19th century who wrote literary epics. There are various panchalis, including the popular Laxi Panchali, which is read by the women to a specific tune in Bengali Hindu households.

became part of Hindu ritual and was performed in formal programs, it seems the translators of the Ramayana were the Brahmins, and the translators of the Mahabharata were of other castes, mainly Kayastha (Sen 208).

This appears to find corroboration in the history of different dynasties and royal courts' manners, where the tradition of reading Mahabharata existed. The first translation of the Mahabharata into Bangla is Paragali Mahabharat (Pandav Bijay) by Kabindra Parameswar (1515), who wrote it on the orders of Paragal Khan, a governor of Sultan Hossain Shah. Many translations of the Mahabharata story into Bangla, like Aswamedha Parba (1552-53) by Ramachandra Khan, a marmanubad⁴⁶ of the Jaimini Samhita. Another, Aswamedha Parba (1567) was translated by Dwija Raghunath, as Sen informs.

Asit Bandopadhyay, in his Bangla Sahityer Itibritta says that except for Kashiram Das in the 17th century, other translators could not show such poetic skill in their translations (Bandopadhyay 426-427). Bandopadhyay shows concern about the quality of translation in comparison with other types of creative writings and their reception while accepting that the translations of Purana, Bhagabata, the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata introduced a sense of literariness in public life as a significant role of translation in medieval Bengal was beginning to be acknowledged. Krittibas was popular among the people and poets alike.

His Ramayana was copied and circulated widely, but many manipulations have been observed in the manuscripts on closer examination. The continuing popularity in the reception of Krittibas's Ramayana establishes him as the most famous

⁴⁶ *Marmanubad* is a process of translation that stands not for the word-to-word translation but the translation of the essence or flavour of the theme or translation of essence.

translator of Ramayana. According to Bandopadhyay, when Serampore Mission decided to print Bengali Ramayana, they considered Krittibas's Ramayana, which was the most popular and most circulated Ramayana text⁴⁷.

Asit Bandopadhyay adds that the manuscript of Shataskandha Ravan Vadh [preserved in the manuscript archive of the Sahitya Parishad, Kolkata] shows more similarities with the Adbhut Ramayana. This is because the famous Adbhut Ramayana was the translation and adaptation of the stories from various regions of Bengal. Therefore, it can be assumed to be a compilation of other Ramayana stories, even including the folk stories. This is how such translations connect different forms of creative and cultural expressions of the community.

Methodology of Translation

According to Asit Bandopadhyay, Adbhut Acharya's translation of the Ramayana is a bhabanubad (440). The concept of bhabanubad indicates an easy reception of translations. Adbhut Acharya's translation did not follow the Sanskrit text of Adbhut Ramayana yet was accepted as a translation. The people quickly acknowledged the existence of different versions of Ramayana stories, and these stories were rooted in the narrative tradition of the common folk. The

⁴⁷ A.K Ramanujan claims the existence of *Ur*-text of *Ramayana* and its many versions or variants. I would like to argue that there is no single *Ur*-text but many *Ur*-texts. Krittibasa was so popular that many texts claimed his name, and there was manipulation by the *Lipikaars*. This makes questions about authenticity problematic. The people who appropriated Krittibasa sometimes negatively impacted his popularity. They had only Krittibasa in mind as the original poet. They were not bothered about Valmiki. General people in Bengal knew Krittibasa's bhasha *Ramayana* or *Ramkatha* in *Bhasha*. This is how Krittibasa appeared as the original. Many versions of Krittibasa will be found, yet there's no meaning in searching for the 'original' Krittibasa. In this sense, I would like to argue; translation also may appear as original text or *Ur*-text.

translation styles of the medieval era introduced interesting variations and have been described with terms like *bhabanubad* by Asit Bandopadhyay and *marmanubad* by Sukumar Sen. These two terms suggest the same meaning, that is, the translation of the essence of the main flavour or theme of the source text as carried into the target text. Asit Bandopadhyay says Adbhut Acharya's translation is a *bhabanubad* of Ramayana, though he translated all the seven parts of the Sanskrit Ramayana. It means that translators of the medieval era appreciated the differences in translation methods, but perhaps this was not explicitly expressed or explained.

When the source and the target texts were found far from each other's narrative, then the target text was called *anukaran* (imitation) of the source text. As has been widely discussed, Kalidasa's *Meghadutam* created the style of "Duta-kavyam" in Sanskrit. I think it is best described as *anukaran*, a generic translation of *Meghadutam*. I believe it is significant that followers of Kalidasa and later literary critics accepted the tradition of *Duta-kavyam* as a sub-genre. But in Bengali literary history, generic translation is not acknowledged as translation. Only the word-to-word or thematic/ narrative translations is recognized as translation.

The fact that most translations of the Puranas, the Bhagbata, the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata, come from multiple sources is another intriguing aspect of these translations. Short pieces, narratives, stories, and experiences from various readers are incorporated by translators into the final product. This means that the translation incorporates whatever information the translators had access to and calls it a rendition of the Ramayana. This inclusive translation method, which was popular among Bengali translators in the Middle Ages, may have made the texts more approachable and accessible to the public. They probably saw this approach as the simplest

and most logical way to communicate knowledge that was already there in Sanskrit and intertwined with the desi.

Asit Bandopadhyay also uses rupantar while discussing Adbhut Acharya's changing poetic form from prose narrative to a metric narrative (441). Rupantar—literally, 'changing form' is another equivalent for the word translation, though limited use. While discussing the work of Ghanashyam Das and his peers, we find them using the word anusaran (to follow) along with anukaran to talk about the process of adaptation of the Ramayana story. Anusaran and the word Anubad both the words are both meant for an almost similar object. Asit Bandopadhyay used the words Anukaran and Anusaran as the methodology of adapting. He used these to discuss how the text was translated. The word which appeared as the opposite of Anusaran is Moulik, which means original or originality. Anusaran, in this context, is used to signify a kind of translation (441).

Dwijanga Ganganarayana's Ramleela and Ghanashyam Das's Sitar Banabas (1618) were translated for palagana, a performative form of enactment with songs. Asit Bandopadhyay also focused his attention on Chandrabati's Ramayana. Chandrabati is the first known woman poet of Bengali literature, and her Ramayana was performed only by women.

The entire manuscript of this Ramayana was not readily available. Ramayana scholar Chandrakumar Dey discovered it and published it in three parts. He commented, "ময়েরোই ইহার গায়ক, ইহার কবী স্ত্রীলোক, ইহার শ্রোতা ও গায়করোও অধিকাংশ স্থানে স্ত্রীলোক" (This Ramayana is performed by women. Women make up the audience and the poets.) (Cited in Bandopadhyay 450). This Ramayana mainly was influenced by folk narratives. Bandopadhyay wonders if Chandrakumar Dey's editing disfigured the language of the original text as the language pattern found in Dey's edition is more similar to the

language of the 20th century and in many places appears as a language of modern poets. Asit Bandopahyay compared extracts from Madhusudan Dutta's poems which he found very much like Chandrabati Ramayana.

However, some of these texts show the non-involvement of women in socio-cultural behaviour and political events. The texts, unless performed, were also not accessible to women. But it is evident when the chance presented itself, women raised their voices and resisted the patriarchal norms. Several versions⁴⁸ of the Ramayana have been found, the translations by different poets who translated different sections from the epics to emphasise various aspects of society (450). Chandrabati's translation is highlighted as a feminist text showing women's empowerment in mind and spirit. The text is also a symbol of resistance against the patriarchal society. Thus, translation played a significant role in reshaping the social psyche of the Hindu community.

Moreover, many mediaeval texts by translators are also the products of collaborative authorship. One can only examine and raise questions about their 'authenticity'; hardly anything is verifiable due to a lack of supplementing texts and necessary documentation. The present-day books or ancient and mediaeval manuscripts have their history of the journey. In this history of travel, a significant amount of manipulation occurred with a particular manuscript due to the extreme popularity of the epics, which were the cultural backbone of the society. There are many *anulikhan*⁴⁹ found in the name of

⁴⁸ The words 'version' or 'variant' are used by A.K. Ramanujan. This argument acknowledges the existence of at least one Ur-text, Valmiki's *Ramayana*. There are parallel *Ramakathas* prevalent apart from versions of *Ramayana*. Many translators incorporated folk *Ramkatha* in their translations of the *Ramayana*. (25)

⁴⁹ *Anulikhan* means copying some text almost verbatim; there may be some additions and deletions made by the copier.

Kashiram Das; there are debates on the authenticity of many parts of Mahabharata he had translated.

Kalidas Ray and other literary historians also raise the authenticity of the translations and the question of authorship. Manuscripts were handwritten and copied by the Lipikars⁵⁰, so there was a great possibility of manipulation and editing as per popular demand. This, too, is an acknowledged fact about translation in the mediaeval era. Such a process also suggests how living was the entire process of writing and translating Kavyas like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Sanatkumar Naskar agrees with the opinion of Sukumar Sen that the birth of translation in the medieval period took place through oral culture. The Brahmanical hegemony of language, knowledge, and religion was resisted through the oral performance tradition of the Kathak Thakur and the Geyaa (something which can be sung) (227).

The Mangal Kabyas (13th–18th century) and translation were both parts of Bangla literature's mediaeval age. Popular translations of the time were performed as well as published in manuscript form. These translators like Pala Gayak and Kathak Thakur were extremely well-liked. A text remained in numerous versions during the continual process of translation in mediaeval Bengal, whereby it developed its own culture or tradition. Since its inception, Krittibas' translation of the Ramayana dominated the socio-cultural spheres, and he was recognised as the most well-known Ramayana translator in

⁵⁰ Gerald L. Bruns calls manuscripts 'open text'. By 'closed text', he means "simply the results of an act of writing that has reached a final form." (113); the existence of *Lipikaar* as a professional group in society proves that there was no end or final shape for textual imagination in manuscript forms. In manuscript culture, the text has various and multilayered texts, so the text is 'open text'. The translation is also a never-ending process and therefore remains open until the print closes it.

Bengal. Krittibas' name was found on numerous texts⁵¹, which may not be something he does. Kalidas Ray, a critic, asserts that Krittibas' translation was supported since he was born into an educated class (53). But it is also a testament to his skill, not merely the stifling hold of the traditions.

Kathak Thakur and Pala Gayak performed religious narratives for ordinary people. They were also responsible for building the environment to receive Sanskrit religious texts among ordinary people. The performance tradition of Bengal also constructed the culture of translation and prepared the ground for written translation. The oral tradition was also responsible for initiating the culture of bhasha; the story of Being bhasha was mainly their enterprise. Another significant finding of this era is that bhasha also developed the idea of Desh. Translators always mentioned Bangla as a Deshi bhasha, and translation happened for the folk or Deshi people.

Conclusion

According to translation theorist Itamar Ivan Zohar, translation takes place when a particular polysystem has any one of the following conditions: "(a) when a poly-system has not yet been crystallized, that is to say, when a literature is "young," in the process of being established; (b) when a literature is either "peripheral" (within a large group of related literature) or "weak," or both; and (c) when there are turning points, crises, or literary vacuums in a literature" (47). In the case of Bangla, the project of building bhasha was initiated by religious education, resistance to the Brahminical hegemony, and strengthening expressivity through bhasha. Translation also introduced new vocabularies and literary language into bhasha.

⁵¹ In manuscript culture, many educated people copied texts and were called *Lipikaar*.

The project of Bhasha through these translations of the epics mentioned above was a reality in Bengal and other parts of India too. Surprisingly, similar terms and ideas were introduced and used in different regions of India for the linguistic shift of literary texts.

For example, according to Tymoczko, incidentally, Malayalam, too, uses an indirect indicator for a translation that many other Indian languages use, of prefixing to the title of a text the word *bhasha* to indicate that it is a translation from Sanskrit, e.g., *Bhasha Ramayana*, *Bhasha Mahabharata*, etc. Though *bhasha* means merely 'speech' or 'language'... it has come more specifically to denote a modern Indian language. Indeed, any current Indian language is distinct from Sanskrit... and it did not need to be further specified to be a 'translated' *Ramayana*; the word '*bhasha*' itself served as a signifier of its translated condition (cited in Theo Hermans).

Bhasha shows the relation between Sanskrit and modern Indian languages. As Tymoczko mentions, "*Bhasha Hamlet*" is not possible. Bengali translations of texts from Persian never used the word '*bhasha*' for them. Neither Alaul nor his instructor used the term *bhasha*. This was more about the sentiment for *Deshi Bhasha*, *Loka Bhasha*. Even the Bengali translation of Sanskrit texts never carried the word *bhasha* as a prefix, unlike Malayalam and Hindi translations, as mentioned by Tymoczko. Saji Mathew uses the word *Bhasha* even in translation from the Indian language into English and English into the Indian language. Mathew takes *bhasha* as a unifying term for all modern Indian languages. I quote, "... there are so few *bhasha* translations of English texts as compared to the enormous industry of English translations of *bhasha* texts." (177).

It is intriguing to see how several Indian languages developed a robust translation culture during the Mediaeval Era and

created a distinct geo-linguistic space known as bhasha. Many modern Indian languages originated or started to get shape in the age of the bhasha, which corresponds to the pre-colonial era, and translation from Sanskrit and Persian made it possible. Although I studied the history of translation in Bengali, the references I cited in the preceding paragraph and the brief history of other Indian literature that I came across made me realise that the history of mediaeval Indian literature may be referred to as the age of bhasha because translation served to build bridges between literary and common, mythical and local, and Sanskrit (and Persian) and modern Indian languages (the Deva and Deshi).

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