

Translation Studies Series

Role of Translation in Nation Building

Role of Translation
in
Nation Building

Edited by **Ravi Kumar**

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**In loving memory of our beloved
friend Anupam Kumar Singh,
Treasurer and Co-founder of Indian
Translators Association, who left us
at an early age of 35**

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I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to International Federation of Translators (FIT), Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Department of Information Technology, Government of India and German Book Office who have extended their support to our International conference held in December 2010.

Preface

Compelled by the unseen forces of almighty, mankind today is ushered into a new era of knowledge and enlightenment. Many old conceptions are being shattered and new values are being infused in human minds and human institutions. Among the new values and conceptions that we have acquired today, 'globalization' is coined very often as a broader and most modern outlook of this age - a perspective which has affected all avenues of human lives including the area of translation.

For India, the concept of globalization does not appear to be a new idea. In the Vedic scriptures the thought of "*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*" (the whole earth is a family) was already pronounced thousands of years ago. However, with the advent of new technologies, the concept "*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*" has undergone tremendous change and the modern day "*globalization*" continues to new channels and newer avenues. Unlike the past, mankind has to deal with a complex fabric of social, cultural, economic, scientific, national and international aspects of a panoramic world view and, in this broader context, the idea of "*earth as a one family*" assumes a multi-faceted role. Today, everyone who wants to keep pace with this unprecedented evolution of humanity from a nomadic life to small tribes to city states to countries and nations and, finally, to a vast '*global family*' of billions of people, must embrace the attitude of a '*world citizen*' whose cares and concerns transcend national boundaries. But there is a word of caution: while embracing the 'whole' we cannot forget the 'unit'. In clear words, this enlightened realization of being a part of a 'global family' does not lessen our responsibilities towards our basic identity as people of a country.

There is no doubt, as Peter Singer said, “Nationalism is a very strong force, but there are other forces operating; there are tendencies pushing towards a larger picture but I still think nationalism is real.”

As such, the role of translation in modern era also needs to be evaluated with a balanced attitude where the surge of feelings of ‘*globalization*’ does not undermine the individuality and distinctiveness of national identities and, on the reserve side of the picture, extreme nationalism does not pose a barrier on the pathway of world citizenship. In fact, both are complementary to each other. To understand this, let us consider this vast world as a garden filled with variety of lovely flowers. Suppose, if this garden had only one type of flower - only roses, only marigolds, only jasmines, or only tulips? I am sure, it would give a monotonous look. However, if the same garden is filled with different types of flowers adding variety of fragrances, the garden will look more enchanting, more mesmerizing, more picturesque. This world is beautiful because of its members, each of whom is distinct, unique, possessed of individual beauty, charm, talents and abilities.

This world is beautiful because its members are various distinctive nations - India, China, USA, UK, Canada, Iran, Iraq, South Africa, Uganda and countless many more - each with its own cultural, ethnic, social and historical fragrances, weaving into a colourful wreath. Thus, even though the concern of **Arthur Clarke**, “**It is not easy to see how the more extreme forms of nationalism can long survive when men have seen the Earth in its true perspective as a single small globe against the stars**”, appears to be valid. It is also true that true nationalism rather promotes a global vision than bars it.

Preserving and disseminating the unique aspects of national attributes has been and will continue to be a major role of

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translation and if our translators forget this responsibility, they can never cater to the growing needs of a rapidly evolutionary world. This is what boils up to be the conclusion of the many articles of this comprehensive compilation on **“The Role of Translation in Nation-building”**.

The role of translation in national integration, particularly in the context of India, is evident from ancient times. My research **“Role of Translation in Nation Building : Indian Perspective - Ancient and Medieval India”** outlines the significant role played by the translation of the two great epics of India - the Ramayana and the Mahabharata - in promoting a national identity of a greater country India, then known by the name of ‘Aryavarta’ or the ‘Abode of the Aryans’. Even in medieval times, Indian literature was widely disseminated by the means of systematic translation of these great epics and other important books. In fact, many historians are of the view that the foreign invaders who came to India only had a ‘political victory’ over this country, but culturally they were grossly overcome by the Indian nation, as well-depicted in the famous poem of Dr. Sir Mohammad Iqbal:

यूनानी, मिस्री, रोमां, सब मिट गए जहां से
कुछ बात है कि हस्ती मिटती नहीं हमारी
सदियों रहा है दुश्मन दौरे—जमां हमारा

*The Greek, the Egyptians, the Romans were all defeated
There is something within that prevents us from being defeated
Even though nations stood against us in enmity since ages*

This credit goes to translators of great Indian classics that India could preserve its cultural and national identity even in the midst of a series of foreign invasions.

The entire British period in India is a blatant example of how translation served the imperial interests and, at the same time, awakened the Indian masses into a new era of modern

knowledge through translation of English classics. **The Industrial Revolution** in England in the 17th century caused a number of important inventions including printing press. The British were looking for a wider market for their products and translation served as a means of propagating their new-found machineries and massive productions. The same revolution also later evoked a feeling of 'Swadeshi' which reflected in the Gandhian movement for the boycott of British clothes and other goods. The historical **Renaissance period** (14th - 17th centuries) is especially worth mention which began from Italy and spread like a wildfire in the whole of Europe. One of the most significant elements of the Renaissance was the rise of nationalism not only in Europe but also in India and the rest of the world. Great writers, scientists, artists, thinkers and philosophers like Machiavelli, Thomas More, Michelangelo, Leonardo Da Vinci, Galileo, Martin Luther King, William Shakespeare, Miguel de Cervantes, Rousseau and many more just changed the course of the world history by their views and masterpieces. It was through translation that the igniting ideas of these powerful minds spread throughout the world. Importantly, it was also in this period that the holy Bible was translated in the people's language. Thus, translation did not serve to create the feelings of nationalism just in one country but in each and every country of the world.

This wonderful power of translation was well understood in the post-colonial era, especially by America as a rising power. As **Dr. Sunil Sawant** aptly writes in his research: **Translation as a Weapon during the Cold War, "After the British left India in 1947, American presence, via its cultural mission, did try to pose an alternative to the British dominance during the cold war. On the basis of the number of American works translated, it is possible to see a clear orientation towards America during the cold war."**

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The vital role that translation could play in the integration of nations was also recognized by Prophet Muhammad, the Founder of Islam. One of the contributors of the articles of this compilation, Shosh Ben-Ari from the University of Haifa, Mt. Carmel (Israel) points out that **“According to the oral tradition (hadith) Muhammad urged his companions to learn languages. In one tradition Zayd ibn Thabit quoted Muhammad: “The prophet, peace be upon him, said to me: I correspond with a people whom I fear might add or delete parts of what is written, so I learnt Syriac. I have learnt it in seventeen days”.**

In modern times, national identities cannot be separated from the economic scenario of a country because the rapid economical development is paving the way for an increased demand for ‘*localization*’ as well as ‘*globalization*’ and more and more translators are in need. Dr. Aymil Dogan from Hacettepe University, Turkey, **discusses how in the Turkish context, the unity in language, culture and ideal have been the three main components in defining what a Turk is. She talks about the Ottoman Empire times when the local people from the minorities were chosen as translators and interpreters and given very high level responsibilities and privileges in the Empire.**

Moving onto the present day, when Turkey has gained the reputation of being the key player in the region due to the policy pursued by it. Translation and interpretation has been at the center of all these events, enabling Turkey to catch up with the contemporary civilization level, the ideal set by Atatürk to be pursued in all fields of life.

Similarly, Alper Kumcu, explains how the rise of economy in the European Union countries (including Turkey) has posed a greater demand on translation: **“Apart from the translation, there is a great demand for interpreting within**

the Union. According the official figures of the Directorate General for Interpretation (DGI), 50-60 EU meetings are organized per day. This figure makes up 10.000 - 11.000 meetings per year. Furthermore, 40 major Commission Conferences are organized every year. In order to meet the demand, there are 500 staff interpreters, 300-400 freelance interpreters and 2.700 accredited freelance interpreters working for EU. However, the demand is growing in proportion with the enlargement process and after 2004 enlargement; DGI needs 15-40 interpreters/day per new language.” Underlining the correlation between financial growth and national identity, he concludes, “**countries aiming to be integrated to the global networks are recommended to reassess their perspective over languages and attach greater importance to translation and interpreting.**”

When we look at the condition of India vis-à-vis the European Union we find a striking difference in the terms of national identity and integration in the wake of economic development. India is emerging as powerful economy of the world and yet perhaps there is a serious lack of unity and integration within the country itself. At one end, when various small countries of European Union are infusing their national identity into an integrated and powerful union, India - though a vast country combined to many individual members of the EU - is still struggling to carve out its giant shape. In **Translating Media Programs for Social Change**, two eminent scholars of the University of Delhi, Ms. Yuki Azaad Tomar and Ms. Neeti Vaid have drawn our attention to this striking gap: “**India is perhaps the only country where the citizens visiting a neighboring state become foreigners in their own land. On the other hand, Indian currency is the only currency in the world to be inscribed with multiple languages.**”

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In this manner, this useful compilation provides in-depth insight into the national and international elements of translation and the various problems standing on its way. All the authors are versatile genius in their fields, associated with research and analysis and take us on a virtual tour from the remote past to the recent times guiding us through the zigzagged path of the history of translation.

Today we are living in a more complicated world in which borders are melting, identities are being infused and yet all this is happening in a process - slowly and steadily - which also demands for preserving individualities. In a nutshell, this is an era of **“thinking globally and acting locally”**. Linguistically also, we are in a more complex world than was ever witnessed by our mortal eyes. More and more linguistic groups which were previously unorganized are now seeking their identification and integration into the national mainstream of a country. A perfect example of this emergence and the preparedness of translation to meet this trend is reflected in one of the articles of this compilation - **Translation and Nation Building in Africa - The Political, Literary and Religious Dimensions** - By Dr. Joseph Nnadi, from the University of Winnipeg (Canada). **“But Translation also plays a major role in nation building within each member state. South Africa, for example, has elevated eleven (11) vernacular languages to the status of ‘official languages’ alongside English. The translation of all national government publications into at least six indigenous languages is now a requirement of the Government.”** Therefore, in modern times, translation is not only needed for creation of national identity but it has also become a necessary tool to keep pace with the globalization and localization processes. Moreover, it has become almost mandatory for content producers to translate their text into different languages to globalize and localize their reach. It

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follows that there is an urgent need to regularize translation by professionalizing its providers and according them an appropriate status which will further the developmental opportunities of the country as a whole. In this, India can (and should) follow the lead of many nations including Australia, Canada, China, and South Africa which have already set up regulatory systems. For this, we need a close collaboration between government, educational institutions, and professional bodies. With a little more systematic approach and focused attention on institutionalizing the translation service sector, India is bound to be a leading genius in this field.

May this compilation of scholarly articles be useful in setting a momentum in this direction not only in India but also in other parts of the world!

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Chapter 1

Role of Translation in Nation Building: Ancient and Medieval India

Nation Building has always been linked to national integration and the creation of national identity. For a country like India, it is a very delicate and challenging matter to deal with the national identity that derives its strength from multiple layers of social, political, religious, economic, cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. However, the communication gap which inevitably arises out of such a diversity of boundaries is constantly being bridged by the people themselves, whose day to day reality is, for the majority, living in a multi-cultural society and interacting in a multilingual manner. We should not forget that the concept of the nation-state is not an ancient or indigenous one but a notion imported relatively recently from Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries. The United Kingdom only became “*united*” through the Act of Union in 1702 when England (and Wales) and Scotland merged politically. We should acknowledge that