

Ancient Assamese Translation Literature and Translation Methods

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Abstract

Translation is a significant and indispensable subject of present time. The tradition of translation has been observed in Indian Literature since very ancient times. References regarding translations are found in the Upanishada and the Brahmanas. These reference present an overview of the antiquity of translation literature. The literature of Indian regional language has come to its present state mainly through translations from Sanskrit Puranas and Upanishada as well as epic like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Translation literature plays an important role in the literary enrichment of a language. Assamese literature also has been carrying a tradition of translation literature since ancient times. The tradition of translation has been observed in all the three eras of the History of Assamese Literature namely- pre-Sankari, Sankari and post- Sankari. Madhav Kandali translated Balmiki's Ramayana into Assamese in the fourteenth century and added to the pride of Assam throughout India. This paper will focus on ancient Assamese literature and give a brief overview of the translation methods of a selected number of translated works.

Keywords: Ramayana, Bhagabat, Dashama, Namghosha, Translation, Summary Translation, Explanatory Translation, Re-creation etc.

0.00 Introduction

0.01 Identity of the subject:

The long history of Assamese literature is divided into various eras or ages, namely the early ages, the Middle Ages and the modern age. The literature of the emerging period, such as Charyapadas and Mantra literature, written between 950 and 1300 AD, is included in the literature of the early age. Again, literature written from 1300 to 1830 AD is included in the Middle Ages. Similarly, the modern era or the present era is from 1826 AD to the present. Among these, the value of medieval Assamese literature is immense.

The medieval Assamese literature again can be divided into three parts-pre-Sankari, Sankari and post-Sankari. These three sections have occupied a significant place in the history of Assamese literature. It is noteworthy that most of the literature written during this period is translational. Literature has been written, studied and practiced in Assam since ancient times under the patronage of the king or any other official. It is noteworthy that these works were written entirely in the shadow of translations or other tents. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata these two epic and the Bhagavad-Purana are the favourite looks of the Assamese parts. Through the translations of these texts the ancient Assamese literature remains bright and shining. Translations of these texts are observed in all three stages of the Middle Ages.

0.02 Objectives of the study:

A study of the history of literary translation in various countries shows that translation was promoted for the purpose of preaching the gospel. Translation enriched the old Assamese literature. In those days, translation literature was written for missionary purposes, but the author's extraordinary skill gave the translation work the form of great literature. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the old Assamese translation literature and translation methods.

0.03 Importance:

The old Assamese translation literature has enriched the whole of Assamese literature. The translation literature of the Vaishnava era attracted all the people to Vaishnavism. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the translation methods of popular works of scholars like Madhava Kandali, Sankardeva, Madhavadeva, Bhattadevas etc. and to judge their importance.

0.04 Method:

This paper adopts an analytical Method.

1.00 Translation Literature Of Pre-Sankari, Sankari And Post-Sankari Periods

1.1 Translation Literature of pre-Sankari period:

We can trace five poets in Assamese literature during the period called pre-Sankari period. These five poets are - Hem Saraswati, Rudra Kandali, Haribar Bipra, Kabiratna Saraswati and Madhaba Kandali, the greatest poet of the pre-sankari era. Among these, all three poets except Hem Saraswati and Kabiratna Saraswati are translators. The Ramayana translated by Madhava Kandali, is an inexhaustible contribution to the Assamese society during the pre-Sankari period. At the end of the 'Lankakanda' of this Ramayana, Kandali himself mentioned that he had done summary translation of the Saptakanda Ramayana. This is an that the seven episodes of the Ramayana were translated by Mahava Kandali. However, the 'Adi' and 'Uttarakanda' of the Ramayana translated by Kandali were not available during the time of Sankardeva, as a result of which Madhavadev and Sankardev translated 'Adikanda' and 'Uttarakanda' respectively and completed Kandali's 'Ramayana'.

Again, another poet of the pre-Sankari era, Rudra Kandali composed the poem 'Satyaki Prabesh'. This poem is a translation of the description of the war journey and heroism of Satyaki, the son of Shini, from the sub-chapter 'Jayadratha' of the 'Drona-parva' of the Mahabharata. He has abbreviated or expanded the description of the original Mahabharata in places or kept it the same in place.

Similarly, another poet who contributed to Assamese literature with translations in the pre-Sankari period was Haribar Bipra. He is the best of the poets who received the patronage of the king of Kamatapur. The two books translated by Haribar Bipra are 'The Battle of Babrubahana' and 'The Battle of Lava-Kusha'. Both poems are translations of the narrative in the 'Jaiminiashwamedha'. Both poems are about the father-son battle and the father's defeat at the hands of his son. In translating both narration into Assamese, the poet is in line with the original jaiminian description of India. Without departing too much from the original, he has shortened the description in places or added things that are not in the original to make the subject matter more beautiful.

Thus, the three poets of the pre-sankari period, Madhava Kandali, Rudra Kandali and Haribar Bipra made an unprecedented contribution to Assamese literature by writing translation literature in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

1.2 The translation Literature of the Sankari Era:

This is the most important period of Assamese literature not only in the Middle Ages but in the entire history of Assamese literature. It was during this time that the sun of Sankar rose in the sky of Assam. There are no words to describe the contribution of this hero to the religion, society, fine arts, literature and culture of Assam. He was a prominent figure in the field of literature, especially in the field of poetry, drama, songs, devotional works, translational and various works on nam-prasanga. His most prominent translation is 'Dashama'. The 'Dashama' is the translation of the 'Bhagavad Purana'. The Mahapurusha translated from the first to the fifty-ninth of the ninety chapters of the tenth-Skandha of the original Bhagavada. This section is called the 'Adi Dashama'. Similarly, in translating the eleventh and twelfth Skandhas, Shankardeva, like a skilled and meaningful translator, transforms the theoretical complexities rich in devotional and philosophical information into the softness of devotional juices.

Another important translation of Guru Sankardeva is "Uttarakanda Ramayan". The missing Uttarakanda of the Ramayana translated by Madhava Kandali was translated by Sankardeva and added the Ramayana.

Following in the footsteps of the Guru and being able to showcase his own talents, another hero of the Assamese society, the dearest disciple of Sankardeva was Madhavdeva. The contribution of this man of letters also incomparable. He co-operated with the Guru by translating the Adikanda of the Ramayana at the behest of the Guru. One of his other translation works is "Bhakti-Ratnawali". The original of this work is the 'Bhakti-Ratnawali' with the Kantimala commentary of the Vishnupuri monk. Again, the 'Namghosha' is the ultimate fruit of Madhavdeva's devotional life. The book contains 1000 Ghoshas, about 600 of which are translations of devotional verses from various scriptures.

Another popular writer of the Sankari era was Ananta Kandali. He wrote the sixth skandha of the Bhagavad Gita, the killing of Vrittasura, the middle and the last Dashama and the Ramayana. His inexhaustible fame is the Middle Dashama and the Last Dashama. From the 50th to the 81st chapter of the original Bhagavad Gita is called the 'Madhya Dashama' and the remaining nine chapters are called the 'Last Dashama'. In translating, he follows the translation method of Sankardeva. In translating the profoundly philosophical Vedastuti of the Last Dashama, Kandali demonstrated profound scholarship and his ability to translate difficult objects of philosophy vividly.

One of the most successful translators of the Sankari era was Ramasaraswati. Inspired by Maharaja Naranarayana, he translated most of the verses of the Salasahasri Mahabharata into Assamese. He also created a class of popular literature called 'Vadhakavya'. He has translated various episodes of the Mahabharata and transformed the narrative in the original Mahabharata into Assamese. Similarly, the Sankari poet and Ratnakar Kandali can be mentioned as translators of the Sankari period.

Therefore, it can be seen that this period is particularly valuable in the history of Assamese literature. Successful translations of the Ramayana, Bhagavad Gita, Purans or Mahabharata strengthened the foundation of the Assamese translation tradition.

1.3 Translational Literature of the Post-Sankari Era:

The tradition of translation continues in the literature of the post-Sankari period. This period is very important for Assamese literature, as it was during this period that Assamese prose gained its status in the hands of Bhattadeva. Bhattadeva translated the three famous, sacred and theoretical Sanskrit scriptures, the 'Katha-Bhagavat', the 'Katha-Gita' and the 'Katha-Ratnawali', into Assamese prose.

After Bhattadeva, Harideva's disciple Bhagawat Acharya wrote three books, the 'Katha Sutra', the 'Sattva-Tantra', and the 'Gitasara'. 'Kathasutra'- is the essence of the entire Bhagavat Gita. Similarly, the 'Sattva-Tantra' is a text on Vaishnava devotional theory. This book is a translation of the 'Sanskrit Sattva-Tantra'. Similarly, Govinda Mishra translated the 'Gita' and Bhattadeva's collection of Sanskrit devotional theories 'Bhakti vivek'. He wrote the 'Padagita' in simple and vivid Assamese verse, discussing the commentaries of Sankari, Bhaskari, Hanumanti and Anandagiri. Gobinda Mishra's vivid translation of 'Bhaktivivek' is one of his masterpieces.

The translation of the Mahabharata and various Purans are specially observed during the post Sankari era. Many poet and writers translated various chapters of the Mahabharata. Kabindra Patra, Ram Saraswati's son Gopinath Pathak, Damodar Das, Damodar Dwija, Kabishekhar and other writers translated the eighteenth chapter of the Mahabharata, Drona Parva, Sabha Parva, Swargarohan Prava, Shalya Prava, Karna Prava etc. In addition Ram Mishra translated 'Hitopadesha' and Bararuchi's sanskrit original 'Dvatringshat Puttalika' under the little of 'Putala Charit'.

There are also translation of various Purans such as Kalapchandra Dwija, Aniruddha Kayastha, Aniruddhadeva, Vishnu Bharati, Gopalcharan Dwija, Keshav Kayastha etc. It is worth-mentioning that it was during this period Madhavdeva's nephew Racharan Thakur translated the sanskrit work of Mahapurusha Shankardeva, 'Bhakti-Ratnakar' into Assamese.

It is noteworthy that the Eighteenth century of the post-Sankari era is marked as a period of expansion and exhaustion. During this period, translations of the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Purans and other practical texts were seen. There are many translation of the Mahabharata by Laxminath Dwija, Subhanath Dwija, Vidyachandra Kabishekhar, Shishta Bhattacharya, Prithuram Dwija and others and "Katha-Ramayana" by Raghunath Mahanta are seen. Similarly, Kabiraj Chakrawarti, Balaram Dwija, Durgeswar Dwija, Ratikanta Dwija etc. translated the 'Brahma-Vaivarta Purana'. Kabiraj Chakrawarti translated Jayadeva's 'Gita-Gobinda Puthi'. Similarly, the 'Hitopadesha' of Bagish Dwija can be mentioned. Thus, the repository of Assamese translation literature has been enriched by translations through various translations during the post-Sankara period.

2.00 Translation Methods:

The word 'translation' means the repetition of what one says in one language into another. From a practical point of view, several types of translation methods are- verse and prose translation, original translation, free translation, word translation, abstract translation, literal translation, concise translation, adaptation translation, re-creation, post-translation etc.

3.00 The Translation Style Of The Assamese Poets:-

It is difficult to discuss the entire ancient literature together among the various types of translation methods. It is within the research work. This discussion will only cover the writing style of some of the translated works of Madhava Kandali, Sankardeva, Madhavadeva, Ramasaraswati and Bhattadeva.

3.1 The Translation Method of Madhava Kandali:

The translation of the Ramayana by Madhava Kandali is the first example of Assamese translation literature. This translation is entirely original but rich in its own additions and regionalism. Kandali's Ramayana is not an exact translation of Valmiki's Ramayana. The basic principle of his translation is 'Iambha parihari sarodhrite', but the necessary events or details are nowhere omitted. Kandali has preserved as much of the juicy and essential verses of Valmiki in his translation as he can. In places, Kandali openly explains what Valmiki expressed briefly. He has paid attention to both beauty and the taste of the reader when translating. Although translational, Kandali's Ramayana is not without beauty. Through the book Kandali's poetic talent is expressed quite a fantastic way. He is skilled in depicting the environment, beautiful description of nature, heroic, humorous, compassionate etc. rasas and in the choice of words. The Ramayana is an invaluable treasure of Assamese literature in its beautiful uses of various ornaments, household metaphors, proverbs, etc. The Ramayana of Madhava Kandali is the oldest written in the regional language of Northern India. Thus, Kandali translated Valmiki's Ramayana into Assamese in the fourteenth century and on the one hand achieved the distinction of writing the first Ramayana in the Neo Indian Aryan language and on the other hand strengthened the foundation of Assamese language and literature.

3.2 The Translation Method of Mahapurusha Shankerdeva:

Almost all the verses written by Mahapurusha Shankerdeva are translational. He either translated books he considered necessary for the Assamese society directly from Sanskrit or showed his talent by writing poems or plays in the line with the originals. In the translation, the Mahapurusha gives only the skeleton of the original- avoiding many complications and filling the gap with the addition of his own creations. He has translated the 10th, 11th and 12th Skandhas of the 'Bhagavad Purana' and the 'Uttarakanda' of the Ramayana in this way.

Among the four main scripts of the Vaishnava religion of Assam one of the main scripts is the 'Dashama' which is a translational work. In the field of translation, Shankaradeva especially took the help of Shridhar Swami's 'Bhagabat Bhavartha Deepika'. In the case of the translation of the 10th Skandha, according to the subject-matter, the translation method is explanatory, the principle is synthetic, abstract, free and literal. The socially conscious poet after looking at the society of the time and did not spare to present the necessary resources for the entertainment of the public. In the context of the translation of the 'Dashama', he continued the outline of the original plot and used the methods of acceptance and exclusion. He also filled in the verses or descriptions that have been omitted from the original with his own creation. Sometimes he has translated the verses exactly to preserve the beauty of the original. Although 'Adi Dashama' is a translation, it is transformed into purely original literature by the expressive description of the various situations presented here. The Guru's horizon-expanding poetic talent and descriptive skill have translated the original verses in such a juicy manner that they seem to be the work of Shankardeva himself. There is very little freedom for the author in translations. Despite the translations of the translation,

the language of Sankardeva's 'Dashama' continues to use the purity, originality and style of the original text.

The 10th Skandha, translated by Sankardeva, is a unique literature, prominent religious text, a work of devotional expression and a philosophical work. This is the unique gift of the great sage to the Assamese society.

The eleventh and twelfth Skandhas of the Bhagavat are full of devotional and philosophical information. The original eleventh Skandha has 31st chapters and 1459 verses. Sankardeva has translated about 846 verses. This shows that the poet has completed the translation with the help of abbreviation. But the meaning of the verses he has translated is presented in a way that is known to everyone. However, he has also combined sources from other Puranas. For example, the wants after the departure of Lord Krishna to haven are taken from other Skandhas and mixed up.

Similarly, the original twelfth Skandha has 13 chapters and 363 verses. These are translated by the Guru in 538 verses. He has kept the original chapters the same in his translation of the 'Uttarakanda', added rhetoric, parables, etc. and has been able to express the full appeal of Balmiki's Ramayana through the policy of acceptance and exclusion.

3.3 The Translation Method of Madhavadeva:

When Mahapurusha Madhavadeva translated the 'Adikanda', he excluded unnecessary stories and revealed only the events and descriptions related to Rama. The Adikanda translated by Mahadhavadeva is rich in juicy descriptions and metaphors. There is no literary in the Bhakti-Ratnavali translated by Madhavadeva, but it is a vivid expression of devotional principals such as the nine types of devotion, the greatness of Sat Sangha and the superiority of devotion to Lord Vishnu. Madhavadeva's translating only by summarizing original.

Translation can be called re-creation. This is convinced by the Namghosha. The book contains 1000 Ghoshas, about 600 of which are translations of devotional verses from various scriptures. Through these verses, each verses is reborn in the combination of Madhavadeva's poetic power, unity with the subject-matter and brilliant personality and this translated work has transformed into as original work. Namghoshas are so familiar to Assamese society that their Sanskrit origin is not known. For example, when one prays 'Muktita Nispriha jito sehi bhakataka namo', one cannot imagine the original 'ye muktavapi nispriha pratipada pronmiladanandadang.'²

3.04 The Translation Method of Ram Saraswati:

Another famous and successful translator after the two Mahapurushas was Ram Saraswati. He has sometimes summarized or explained the origins from time to time, taking into account the tastes and needs of peoples lives. He also made the translation enjoyable to the public by sometimes adding stories that were not in the original. There are no incomprehensible doctrinal judgements in the translation of Ram Saraswati, no unnecessary explanations of boring theology and the works are not burdensome. Vividness is characteristic of his writing style. The act of translating the huge Mahabharata for the benefit of the masses has made him a successful translator.

3.05 The Translation Method of Bhattadeva:

In the post-Sankara era, Bhattadeva became the father of prose literature by translating the Katha-Bhagavat, Katha-Gita and Katha-Ratnavali into Assamese prose. As Damodardeva asked to transform the Bhagavata into short and simple form, Bhattadeva

obeyed his Guru and translated Bhagavata into Assamese prose. In the Katha-Bhagavat, Bhattadeva uses commentaries but does not translate them exactly, but simplifies the subject-matter, without invoking arguments like in the Katha-Gita.

Bhattadeva uses a fairy tale and profound form of spoken language. He has adopted the vocabulary and grammatical structures used in the verses books and applied them to the syntax of the spoken language. Though he adopted prose or spoken method as the medium of expression, he could not entirely leave the affection for composing verses. His style has become rhythmic especially in places of the Katha-Bhagavata. In such places, the sentences in any society, the method is applied for questioning as well as answering, the same method is applied to write 'Katha-Gita' and 'Katha-Bhagavat'.

He wrote the 'Katha-Ratnawali' based on the commentary of Shridhar Kandali. The book is written in a conversational manner and the influence of the 'Kantimala' commentary is indelible.

Bhattadev's prose is characterized by the use of indigenous words or expressions as much as possible without disturbing the meaning and beauty of the original. The interpretive style of Bhattadev prose, that is, the method of raising questions and explaining the answers, is noteworthy. Along with seriousness and devotion in thought, clarity and simplicity, patriality are some of the features of Bhattadeva's prose style. The old Assamese translation literature cannot be classified into any of the various style divided by contemporary scholars. For example, various methods of translation are expressed in Sankardev's Dashama, Kandali's Ramayana, Madhabdeva's Namghosha, etc. Many translations are undoubtedly on par with the originals.

4.00 Conclusion

The translation work, which began in the pre-Sankari era, coming through Sankari period and continued till the post-Sankari era, became characterised by various translations literature. In this regard, it can be said that the value of medieval Assamese translation literature is immense and incomparable in the long history of Assamese literature.

Footnotes:

1. Kalita, Bhabendra : Anubad Tattva, P. 32
2. Duttabaruah, Harinarayan (Interpreter): Satik Nam-Ghosha, P. 54

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