



# Mapping the Trajectory of Translation in Indian Nepali Literature

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**Abstract:** *The arrival of imperialists in Darjeeling Hills introduced the idea of translation in the late nineteenth century. Alongside the imperialists, the arrival of Christian missionaries in the late nineteenth century in the Darjeeling Hills actively utilised translation. Then, the translation was chiefly used as an effective tool to fulfil their aims. Thus, the practice of translation was initially used for such purposes in the Darjeeling Hills. The British imperialists and the Christian missionaries were popular for using the idea of translation at that time. The Christian missionaries' agenda of translating the Bible and Gospel tracts into local languages was the main goal of their mission. The British imperialists decided to use vernacular to carry out their tasks. The imperialist realised that utilising vernacular would be beneficial in effectively carrying out their mission. On the part of the Christian missionaries, they had realised that translating into vernacular would help them to fulfil their mission. Therefore, both the imperialist and the missionaries took advantage of vernacular and translation in carrying out their mission. Hence, translation and vernacular were employed to achieve the desired goal of both of these groups. Thus, this paper attempts to analyse the role of translation and the importance of vernacular from the late nineteenth century till the present time.*

**Key Words:** *translation, vernacular, imperialists, Christian missionaries, Nepali.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

The arrival of British imperialists and the Christian Missionaries in Darjeeling Hills in the mid-nineteenth century introduced new ideas to rule over the people of Hills. Amongst such ideas, was the idea of translation employed by the British imperialists and the Christian Missionaries to achieve their respective aims. The chief politics behind the usage of translation was to carry out their desired mission in Darjeeling Hills. Thus, this particular politics of translation was popular at that time in Darjeeling. Translation, therefore, had a finite scope during this period.

Only recently the practice of translation in Indian Nepali Literature has started to gain its ground. There have been several individuals and intermediaries putting an effort to translate Indian Nepali Literature into other languages. Therefore, diligently recording the efforts of these intermediaries becomes necessary while mapping the journey of translation of Indian Nepali Literature. Thus, the journey of translation of Indian Nepali Literature required proper documentation.

## 2. TRANSLATION IN LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

To proceed further with translation, embracing vernacular (local language) became a necessity for imperialists as well as Christian missionaries. To learn the local language, publishing a dictionary became one of the foremost activities of that time. So, the British imperialists published an English-to-Nepali dictionary. In the year 1820, J A Aytton, published 'A Grammar of the Nepalese Language' to curb the language complexities of that time" (Pradhan,19). The main purpose of publishing this grammar was to facilitate and engage in reciprocal communication between the imperialists and the people of Darjeeling. Indeed, the publication of this grammar became courageous enough to carry out translation activities during that time. This grammar became helpful enough for Christian missionaries in their translation activities. Moreover, at the same timeline, the Christian missionaries had also started to engage in translation activities. The politics lying behind their translation activities were different from the imperialists. The Christian missionaries' agenda of translating the Bible and Gospel tracts into local languages was the main goal of their mission.

Their ultimate goal was to disseminate and preach the gospel in Darjeeling Hills. Amongst the missionaries, Scottish missionaries were purposefully interested in translating some parts of the Bible into vernaculars. The vernacular at that time was Nepali and Lepcha. Therefore, they attempted to make vernacular the target language. In 1875, the missionaries also became successful in employing the locals in the translation of the Bible into Nepali. For this purpose, one of the locals named Ganga Prasad Pradhan was employed as an official translator of the Bible from English into Nepali. So, during this time, the practice of translation was merely restrained to fulfilling the purposes of the imperialists and the activities of the missionaries. Hence, translation during this phase in Darjeeling was intentionally utilised as a power tool. Therefore, the practice and scope of translation were confined during this phase. The scanty rate of literacy in this phase proved to be a testing period for translation.

In the early twentieth century when print was introduced in the Darjeeling Hills, the first printing venture was initiated by Ganga Prasad Pradhan. Pradhan established his printing press known as *Gorkha Press* in 1901. Ganga also translated hymnals and Bible from English into Nepali. Since he was an official translator of the Scottish Missionaries, he was actively engaged in translating the Bible into Nepali. The idea of engaging the locals in translation became handy on the part of the Christian missionaries (reception of translation activity). Nevertheless, Ganga Prasad Pradhan did not stay finite to translating the Bible alone. Pradhan as a new translator tried out his interests in various translation pursuits. He translated several children's stories from English into Nepali in the second decade of the twentieth century. One of the translators to help him in translation was Miss Golen. Stories such as *Saida Bhanney Manchey ko Katha* (1909), *Hindusthan ko Itihaas ko Postak* (1910), *Nightingale Arthaath Mitho Geet* (1912), *Baans ko Katha* (1913) *Haans ko Naramro Challako Katha* (1914), *Euta Bataurey Sathi* (1916). These translations signify that the practice of translation as a literary activity was initiated by Pradhan during the second decade of the twentieth century. However, these translations of his have been overshadowed due to the criticisms of colloquial usage of Nepali. Despite being the sole local to engage himself in extensive translation activities, his translations have remained unnoticed in Indian Nepali Literature. Nevertheless, the translation activities of Christian missionaries helped Pradhan to explore his translation pursuits. Besides Bible translation, Pradhan's translation and his interest in translation, possibly be regarded as the reception of translation as a literary activity rather than just a power tool. Perhaps, what was initially introduced as a power tool was later received as a literary activity by the locals. Thus, these above-mentioned translations by Pradhan can be considered as the reception of translations by the locals.

### **3. TRANSLATION IN NEPALI PERIODICALS :**

While Ganga was carrying on with his translation pursuits, Indian Nepali periodicals had recently started to get published. During this time, if analysed closely, translation was also followed by the periodicals as well. The Nepali periodicals had started to publish translations from different Indian languages into Nepali. Gradually, translation started to seep into a popular literary activity during the early twentieth century. *Chandrika* (1918), a periodical from Kurseong has essays translated from Bengali into Nepali. In the first issue of the periodical, a biography of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee was published with the title "Bankim Chandra Chatterjee" which continued till the second issue of the periodical. In the sixth issue of the periodical, an essay titled "Junkiri: Manasya Khadot" was translated from Bengali into Nepali is published which continued till the eighth issue of the periodical. Thus, translation positively facilitated Indian Nepali Literature to understand the existence of other Indian Literature. It acted as a window for Indian Nepali Literature to realize not only the presence of other literature but also their culture. By this time, translation had purely become a serious literary activity as practised by the locals. The politics of translation, therefore, had radically changed from the time of the Christian missionaries and imperialists. During the time of the periodicals, translation from other languages into Nepali as a literary activity was followed by the Nepali periodicals. Thus, the translation in periodicals facilitated the contact of Nepali Literature with Bengali Literature. The idea behind the translations in the periodicals was to make the readers aware of works of literature other than their own. Indeed through translation, Indian Nepali Literature was enriched in its formative years. *Chandrika* (1918-1920) remains an iconic periodical to have initiated this relationship between Nepali and Bengali Literature. Another periodical *Bharati* (1948-1950) too, has translations from English into Nepali. In the second issue of *Bharati*, a translation of Orison Swett Marden's "Pushing to the Front" was published. Hence, during the time of the periodicals, translation allowed Indian Nepali Literature to build a connection with other literatures. During this period, Indian Nepali Literature did not stay away from other Indian Literature.

### **4. TRANSLATION FROM OTHER LANGUAGES INTO NEPALI :**

In 1948, Nepali Sahitya Sammelan (literary organisation) published a separate anthology of short stories titled *Tolstoy ka Katha haru*, a collection of translated short stories by Leo Tolstoy. Thus, it is noticeable to understand the



extent that the practice of translation had reached in Indian Nepali Literature. Jiwan Namdung states “since the time Nepali Language was recognised by Sahitya Akademi in 1975, many books of Indian languages have been translated and published into Nepali language (Namdung, 115). In the late twentieth century, after Sahitya Akademi recognised Nepali (National Academy of Letters), active translation from other Indian languages into Nepali went full swing. In the year 1962, a collection of Bengali short stories titled *Rabindranath ko Kathaharu* by Ishwar Baral was published. The above-mentioned translations and translation works have helped Nepali Literature to come in closer contact with other Indian Literature. Alongside literature, the practice of translation facilitated Indian Nepali Literature to understand other Indian cultures as well. In fact, for Indian Nepali Literature, translation helped to understand the existence of other Indian Literature. Indian Literature is the existence of a variety of Indian Literature where these literatures share a common history and geographical territory. To add more, Indian Literature share an interrelationship and coexists in harmony. To some extent, the motto of Sahitya Akademi journal “Indian Literature is one though written in many languages” stands obsolete when Indian Literature is to be defined. It is not only the existence of multiple languages rather Indian Literature is the unique and artistic expression of the heterogenous community of Indian people in their respective languages. Thus, translation becomes one of the potential intermediaries to bring together Indian Literature closer to each other. Translation, too was practised and undertaken seriously by the individuals and various literary organisations in bringing Nepali literature closer to other language and literatures.

Translation not only facilitated Indian Nepali Literature the interaction with other Indian Literature. Some of the western texts were also selected for translation into Nepali. The mid twentieth century witnessed several translation works such as “Prakash Kovid’s *Gullivers Travel* (1966), Indra Sundas’s *Rabindranath Rachnabali* (1964), Okiyama Gwain’s *Julius Caesar* (1974)” (Namdung 116). Hence, these translations served as an opportunity for Indian Nepali Literature to view other literature from outside the common geographical territory as well. Therefore, the translations from other languages into Nepali developed as a serious literary activity, unlike the time of the imperialists and missionaries. The practice of translation, therefore, made the world seem much closer and compact.

## 5. TRANSLATION FROM NEPALI INTO OTHER LANGUAGES :

Namdung in *History of Modern Indian Nepali Literature* opines that only a handful of books from Nepali into other languages were translated in comparison to the vice-versa. Nevertheless, in the wake of the early twenty-first century considerable number of efforts were put in by individuals and different organisations to translate from Nepali into other languages (especially Indian languages). Thus, the practice of translation was the other way around in the early twenty-first century. Further, Sujit Mukherjee’s *Translation as Discovery* aptly underscores the role of translation in the learning and discovery of Indian literature. *An Anthology of Nepali Short Stories in English* edited by Bhanu Chettri and Mangal S Subba in 1997 is one of the efforts in translation from Nepali into English. Another noteworthy translation is *Gorkhas Imagined*, a translation of the collection of short stories and essays of Indra Bahadur Rai into English in 2009. In 2011, a Salesian College publication translated Shiva Kumar Rai’s collection of short stories *Khaharey* into English. The initiative and endeavours of different translation centres in different parts of India have helped in the translation from Nepali into other Indian languages. Some are listed such as the Translation Centre of Salesian College, Sonada which has been actively engaged in translation ventures since 2008. One of the most noteworthy efforts in translation is the CENTIL (Centre for Translation of Indian Literatures (CENTIL) of Jadavpur University. This particular centre for translation has been actively engaged in translation, translating from Nepali into English and Bengali. The centre has published a collection of Nepali Short stories called the *Call of the Hills: A Coursebook of Indian Nepali Literature in Translation vol.1*. Thus, the practice of translation is fast-paced with the engagements of a few of the organisations and projects undertaken by such organisations. Nepali lyrics such as *sawai*, *lahari*, *tamang selo*, Nepali short stories and literary essays have already been translated into English and Bangla from this Centre. In 2018, the Centre also undertook the project of translating significant texts from the iconic periodical *Chandrika* into English. This translation was carried out under the project *Anuvad* in a collaborative manner. Thus, the initiative of CENTIL, Jadavpur University, for the translation of Nepali literature into English and Bangla is a work of commendable merit. This initiative of the Centre has tremendously facilitated Indian Nepali Literature a wider exposure in India and beyond. The above-mentioned translation projects by CENTIL have significantly helped in promoting Indian Nepali Literature. The translation projects and workshops undertaken by the above-discussed translation centres in India have significantly helped in promoting Indian Nepali Literature to India and beyond. No doubt, in translation and for translation, English has tremendously played a link language in the context of the Indian language and works of literature. Hence, citing Sujit Mukherjee “The proverbial brace of birds can be killed by the same stone if we direct the

learning of English towards the discovery not of England's literature but of the literature written in the many Indian languages." (Mukherjee,38).

The strenuous efforts of these various centres in translating from Nepali into English strengthened the relationship of Nepali with other Indian literature. As a result, the efforts of this translation Centre from Nepali into other languages did not let Nepali Literature remain in isolation. Recently in 2022, a Translation workshop conducted by the Sikkim University undertook the task of translation from various languages into English. Amongst such languages are Bhutia, Hindi, Lepcha, Nepali and, Limbu. This workshop successfully translated selected short stories from the above-mentioned languages into English. One of the remarkable steps undertaken in the workshop is the selection of oral folktales of Nepali into English. Hence, these translation initiatives have opened up the possibilities of translating even the oral narratives of Darjeeling and Sikkim into English. There are several translation centres and efforts in different parts of India "in 2015 Sahitya Akademi opened a North East Centre for Oral and Tribal Literature (NECOL) in Manipur University, Imphal for the translation of languages spoken in the North East Region (118).

From the above discussion, it is plausible to understand the change in practice and the politics of translation since the late nineteenth century in Darjeeling Hills. Earlier the translation was solely employed to exercise control over the people by the British imperialists. Later from the early twentieth century, translation as a literary pursuit was followed by a few individuals, periodicals and literary organisations in different parts of India. Eventually from the first decade of the twenty-first century translation from Nepali into other Indian languages has more profoundly advanced. In reaching the twenty-first century, translations from Nepali into other languages also developed as a literary activity and interaction. In addition to this, collaborative translation by the above-mentioned organisation is also a signification that translation had emerged as the most feasible literary activity amongst various Indian literatures. Especially, in a multilingual and multicultural country like India, the practice of translation allows vibrant interaction among Indian Literature. Translation is the most potential literary activity if interaction and interrelationship are to co-exist in harmony.

From the above explication of the journey of translation in Indian Nepali Literature, it becomes apparent to comprehend that the practice of translation has significantly advanced. Thus, the practice of translation in Darjeeling Hills has had a revolutionary change over a century. Further, translation broadened the importance of the Indian Nepali language and literature immensely. Lastly, translation as an intermediary aided in the realisation of the potentiality of artistic expression of Indian Nepali literature.

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