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TRANSLATION IN MULTIPLE: MAHĀTMĀ AND MUNSHĪ'S TRANSLATIONS OF NARSINH'S VAISHNAVJAN TO . . . : A (COMPARATIVE) STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The art of translation allows the translation to take place at various levels of texts and translators. Not as a matter of surprise, the attempts are always made by translators to translate the Source Language (SL) text into the Target Language (TL) text. However, it renders surprise when the same SL text has very often been translated into the same TL text by various hands. More often than not, it has been observed that though the same SL text has been rendered into the same TL text, it is produced into a variety of versions with various unbelievable variants of inequality. Since all translators translate with reference to their knowledge, time, skill, technique, need, intention and above all interpretation, the TL texts are bound to differ in their various versions. This research paper, by studying the translations of Narsinh Mehtā's (1414-1480/1?) *bhakti* poem *Vaishnavjan to . . .* into English done by Mohandās Karamchand Gāndhī (1969-1948) - popularly known as Mahātmā (Gāndhī) and Kanaiyālāl Māneklāl Munshī (1887-1971) - mostly famous as Munshī, does not attempt to judge which of these TL texts is superior or inferior, but it is attempted here to analyze these TL texts for the beneficial interest of the readers and to cultivate the aspects of K. M. Munshī as a translator as well along with as a novelist, dramatist, story writer and essayist. It further very humbly attempts to state that the multiple translations of the same TL text always result into the availability of various versions for the *sahraday*(sensitive) readers.

Key Words: *Vaishnavjan*, translation, *vairāgya*, *Rāmnām*, *Narsaiyo*, *darshan*, *ekoter*

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More often than not, it has been observed that though the same SL text has been rendered into the same TL text, it is produced into a variety of versions with various unbelievable variants of inequality. Since all translators translate with reference to their knowledge, time, skill, technique, need, intention and above all interpretation, the TL texts are bound to differ in their various versions. This research

paper, by studying the translations of Narsinh Mehtā's (1414-1480/1?) *bhakti* poem *Vaishnavjan to . . .* into English done by Mohandās Karamchand Gāndhī (1969-1948) - popularly known as Mahātmā (Gāndhī) and Kanaiyālāl Māneklāl Munshī (1887-1971) – mostly famous as Munshī, does not attempt to judge which of these TL texts is superior or inferior, but it is attempted here to analyze these TL texts for the beneficial interest of the readers and to cultivate the aspects of K. M. Munshī as a translator as well along with as a novelist, dramatist, story writer and essayist. It further very humbly attempts to state that the multiple translations of the same TL text always result into the availability of various versions for the *sahraday* (sensitive) readers.

VAISHNAVJAN TO . . . IN THE SOURCE LANGUAGE TEXT:

Narsinh Mehtā, also known as Narsinh Mahetā, Narsi Mehtā or Narsinh Bhagat or Narsinh Mehto or Narsaiyo or Narsaiyā, was a Saint-poet of Gujarātī literature. Notable as a *bhakta Nāgar* Brahmin and an exponent of the *Vaishnav* poetry, he has been revered in Gujarātī literature having acclaimed as an “Ādi Kavi” (The ancient poet). As a human being loving *sādhu*, saints and all those whom he considered *Harijans*- the children of Hari, the God irrespective of their class, caste or sex. This resulted into his being despised by the *Nāgars* of Junāgadh who always scorned, insulted and taunted him. However, neglecting the behavior of his own people, Narsinh continued to pray Lord Krishnā by composing *pada* (verse), *ākhyān* (fable) and *prabhātiyā* (a song sung at dawn) which describe the life and love-play of Krishnā with the *Gopis* of Gokul very passionately. He is more known for his religious *bhajan* (song) *Vaishnavjan to Tene Kahiye, Je Pid Parāyee Jāne Re*, a synonym to him, offering the reformative virtues of equality and fraternity in the orthodox caste-conscious society extending the helping hand to the needy people establishing the basic philosophy of the *bhakti* cult. Though very simple in style, *Vaishnavjanto . . .* has been the most impressive devotional song sung in almost all the villages of Gujarāt and India.

VAISHNAVJAN TO . . .

*Vaishnavjan to tene kahiye, je pid parāyee jāne re;
Par dukhe upkār kare toye, man abhimān na āne re.*

*Sakal lok mā sahune vande, nindā na kare keni re;
Vāchkāchh man nischal rākhe, dhan dhan janni teni re.*

*Samdrashti ne trushnā tyāgi, parstri jene māt re;
Jihyā thaki asatya na bole, par dhan nav zāle hāth re.
Mohmāyā vyāpe nahi jene, dradh vairāgya jenā manmā re;*

*Rāmnām shu tāli re lāgi, sakal tirath tenā tanmā re.
Vanlobhi ne kapat rahit chhe, kāmkrোধ nivāryā re;
Bhane Narsaiyo tenu darshan kartā, kul ekoter tāryā re.*

Both Mahātmā and Munshī liked this devotional song very much and in order to offer many people to suck the nectar of it, both of them have translated it into English in their own ways differing in the style, technique, choice of the words, interpretations and the target readers. The following discussion followed by the SL text attempts to recognize the skill of both Mahātmā and Munshī as translators.

MAHĀTMĀ'S TRANSLATION OF VAISHNAVJANTO . . .:

Mahātmā Gāndhī, the name itself is enough to describe his significance as a “great soul” (mahātmā), is the pioneering personality of not only Gujarāt but of the whole of the nation. More known as a very kind and benevolent human being rather than a politician, he has also served not only Gujarāt but the whole nation by his principles and literary writings. His influence on Gujarātī, Hindi and English literature in India is immense. As a great and prolific translator, Mahātmā himself directed the location of English in the post-colonial Gujarāt along with the activities of translation. As a translator, he translated Plato's *Apology* and Tolstoy's *Letter to a Hindoo* into Gujarātī. He translated and published a nine-part paraphrase of Ruskin's *Unto This Last* as *Sarvodaya* into Gujarātī. He also translated the *Bhagvad Gita* into Gujarātī publishing it as *Anāsakti*. He translated the *Āshram Bhajanāvali* and *Hind Swarāj* into English. The sincerity and seriousness of Mahātmā are felt when as Suhrud comments, he “himself commissioned” translations and “supervised and authenticated most translations of his works” (Suhrud 2009: 108). Mahātmā's translation of *Vaishnavjan to . . .*, done on 15th October 1930, with the same sincerity and authenticity is as follows:

He is a Vaishnav who identifies himself with other's sorrow and in doing so has no pride about him. Such a one respects everyone and speaks ill of none. He controls his speech, his passions and his thoughts. May his mother be blessed. He is equi-disposed towards all, has no desires, regards another's wife as his mother, always speaks the truth and does not touch other people's property. He labours neither under infatuation nor delusion and withdraws his mind from worldly things, he is intent on Ramanama; his body is his sacred shrine for pilgrimage; he is no miser and is free from cunning and he has conquered passions and anger. Narsaiyo says: His presence purifies his surroundings. (Gandhi 1971: 437)

The same translation has been quoted by Rolphy Pinto in his article "Gems of Bhakti Mysticism of Narsinh Mehta in the Letters of Francis Xavier" published very recently in a journal *Ignaziana: rivista di ricerca teologica* published by the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome. In this translation of *Vaishnavjan to . . .* done by Mahātmā Gāndhi but quoted by Pinto, certain changes are made and added by square-bracketing (sic) in order to explain some words and lines of the SL text. Moreover, it seems that Pinto has tried to give this translation a poetic colour by attempting to offer it a kind of the poetic form as Mahātmā has simply translated it into a prose. Here follows that translation of Mahātmā quoted by Pinto:

He is a Vaishnav who identifies himself with other's sorrows,
and in doing so has no pride about him.
Such a one respects everyone and speaks ill of none.
He controls his speech, his passions and his thoughts. May his mother be blessed.
He is equi-disposed towards all, has no desires, regards another's wife as his mother, always speaks the truth and does not touch other people's property [does not cover others' wealth].
He labours neither under infatuation nor delusion and withdraws his mind from worldly

things, he is intent on Ramanama; [engrossed in God's name]; his body is his sacred shrine for pilgrimage [he embodies all places of pilgrimage];

he is no miser and is free from cunning [greedless and deceit-less] and he has conquered passions and anger.

Narsaiyo says: His presence purifies his surroundings.

(Pinto 2014: 150-151)

MUNSHĪ'S TRANSLATION OF VAISHNAVJAN TO ...:

As one of the most prominent and distinguished creative writers of Gujarāt, the contribution of K. M. Munshī, known as "the father of historical novels" and "Kulpati Munshī", who thrilled and enthralled Gujarāt by his historical novels depicting the grandeur of Gujarāt, cannot be underestimated. As a true Renaissance man and activist, Munshī extended his activities into many directions. His works written in Gujarātī, Hindi and English languages outnumber novels, short stories, plays, essays, biographies, autobiographies and history of Gujarātī literature. Having created the phrase *Gujarātī Asmitā* [the (self-)consciousness of Gujarāt], Munshī attempted to enhance the *asmitā* of Gujarāt making her a living factor in all aspects. Influenced by Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950) and as a lover of Narsinh Mehtā and also of Hinduism, he translated *Vaishnavjan to . . .* into English to show his reverence to Lord Krishnā and to make it available to not-Gujarātī knowing readers to spread the rich religious heir also. However, Gujarāt knows Munshī more as a creative writer than as translator, he translated with the gifted intensity, strong sense of understanding and penetrating eyes. The following is Munshī's translation of Narsinh Mehta's *Vaishnavjan to . . .* into English:

He is the real Vaishnav who feels other's suffering as his own. He serves those who are afflicted and has no conceit. He bows before everyone, despises none; is steady in word, body and mind. Blessed is the mother of such a man. His outlook is always dispassionate; he has left all desires; he sees a mother in another man's wife. He never speaks an untruth, and touches no

one's wealth. Ignorance does not overpower him; his mind knows stern detachment.

He has experienced ecstasy in the worship of Ram; his body in itself possesses all places of pilgrimage. He has no avarice, he knows no fraud, he has outgrown desire and anger. Narsaiya says: To look at such a man is to earn merit enough to save seventy one generations from hell.

A (COMPARATIVE) STUDY:

The translation of *Vaishnavjan* to . . .into English by Mahātmā sounds more like a paraphrase, simply the transfer of one language into another, of Gujarātī into English, which renders it less literary in taste whereas that of Munshī sounds literarily tastier than that of Mahātmā's. However, one must note without fail that though both of them have not retained the poetic form of the SL text into the TL text very strictly in a serious poetic sense, the translation of Munshī sounds more poetic, of course not in form but in its tone. The translation of Munshī appears, if the detailed comparative and analytical study of these translations is made, more poetic, authentic and semantic oriented. Their not retaining the poetic form into the TL text very strictly offers no reason to believe that as great writers of their own time, they were not aware of the form of the literary genre of poetry and therefore these translations are beyond questions. Any translator when translates, certainly has his/her purposes and goals to achieve. And therefore, the strategies adopted by these various translators while translating are different according to their need and end. Needless to say, that when Mahātmā and Munshī translated *Vaishnavjan* to . . ., it was the period when the activity of translation was not much flourished and nourished. Mahātmā translated the whole of the TL text *Vaishnavjan* to . . .as more poetic paraphrase only in the prose and Munshī translated the same into two paragraphs whereas the SL text (Narsinh's *pada*) retains five stanzas with each one having a couplet.

The poem begins with the word *Vaishnavjan*, the most important word of the whole poem and the very first word of the very first stanza of the poem, which has been retained by both of

them without explaining and footnoting it. As a word of *bhakti* tradition, *Vaishnavjan* means "belonging to Vishnu, the Lord of Lords". It refers to a follower of the sect that considers Vishnu as the Supreme God. But here, a *Vaishnavjan* is a true devotee of the Lord Krishnā. For the word *pid*, Mahātmā uses "sorrows" and Munshī in a more poetic way uses "suffering". Mahātmā translates *jāne re* as "identifies" and Munshī as "feels". Even *pardukh* becomes "afflicted" for Munshī and Mahātmā simplifies it as "In doing so". *Abhimān* becomes "pride" for Mahātmā and "conceit" for the other. The vocabulary selected by Munshī for the translation of this very first stanza is emotionally more sound and expressive.

In the second stanza, *vande* is rendered by Mahātmā as "respects" and by Munshī as "bows". Mahātmā translates *nindā na kare kenī re* as "speaks ill of none" and Munshī as "despises none". For *sakal lok*, both of them have used "everyone" whereas it refers to "the whole world or universe". Even for *dhan dhan janni tenī re*, Mahātmā has used the modal auxiliary "may" anticipating the possibility of the *Vaishnavjan*'s mother to be blessed as "May his mother be blessed" whereas Munshī renders it a passive construction with the simple present tense as "Blessed is the mother of such a man". The very difficult line *Vāchkāchh man nischal rākhe* is translated by Mahātmā as "controls his speech, passions and thoughts" whereas by Munshī as "steady in word, body and mind". It seems that by the simple choice of words, Munshī expresses the meaning and emotions heartily.

In the third stanza, Mahātmā translates the word *samdrashti* as "equi-disposed" and Munshī as "dispassionate". However, for *trushnā* and *parstri*, both of them have shown their agreement in the use of the words like "desires" and "another's wife". Mahātmā translates the line *Jihyā thaki asatya na bole* as "always speaks the truth" converting it to be affirmative in tone, whereas Munshī while translating it, retains it original as "never speaks an untruth". Even while translating *par dhan nav zāle hāth re*, both of them differ structurally as Mahātmā's translation is "does not touch other people's property" and that of Munshī is "touches no one's wealth".

In the fourth stanza, while translating *Mohmāyā vyāpe nahi jene, dradh vairāgya jenā manmā re*, Mahātmā's interpretation sounds very strong when he says "He labours neither under infatuation nor delusion and withdraws his mind from worldly things" compared to Munshī's rendering into English as "Ignorance does not overpower him; his mind knows stern detachment". *Rāmnām shu tāli re lāgi* is translated by Mahātmā more closely to the SL text as "he is intent on Ramanama" and by Munshī as "He has experienced ecstasy in the worship of Ram". While translating *sakal tirath tenā tanmā re*, Munshī in his translation as "his body in itself possesses all places of pilgrimage" sounds semantically closer than Mahātmā's as "his body is his sacred shrine for pilgrimage".

The first word of the last stanza *vanlobhi* has been extended into the full sentence by Mahātmā and Munshī both respectively as "He is no miser" and "He has no avarice". Retaining the original as closely as possible, Mahātmā translates *Kapat rahit* as "free from cunning" compared to Munshī's "knows no fraud", transferring an affirmative sentence into a negative one. Mahātmā's translation of the last line of the poem *Bhane Narsaiyo tenu darshan kartā, kul ekoter tāryā re* as "Narsaiyo says: His presence purifies his surroundings" focuses more on the social and geographical sense compared to Munshī's "Narsaiya says: To look at such a man is to earn merit enough to save seventy one generations from hell" which sounds more moral, religious, metaphorical and meaningful.

CONCLUSION

Thus, on the basis of the detailed analytical study made, it can be concluded that the translation of *Vaishnavjan to . . .* made by Mahātmā, as it appears from the very translated text (TL text) itself, is made perhaps keeping in mind a layman, one who is not the *sahraday* (sensitive enough to relish literature). Really, Mahātmā could see the potentiality in the *Vaishnavjan to . . .*, according to Shukla-Bhatt "to circulate his ideal of a religious person" to a layman and therefore he may have translated it very simply. This assessment of Mahātmā's understanding of religion "has

interpretation, moral example, and public service at its core". She further states, "*Vaishnavjan to*, itself an interpretation of the term "Vaishnava" by Narsinha who offered an example of empathy and inclusiveness rather than a doctrine, offered Gandhi a perfect text in accessible language to convey his ideal of what it means to be religious and fully human" (Shukla-Bhatt 2015: 193). Thus, it is observed that *Vaishnavjan to . . .* allows Mahātmā to challenge the traditional and orthodox definition of a religion in the name of "Vaishnav". This poem of Narsinh, as it seems, has offered him a scope to relate to moral messages through musical performance.

It seems that Mahātmā desired to realize that the *bhajan* (psalm) *Vaishnavjan to . . .* should reach to each and every person irrespective of caste, creed, place and education, whereas Munshī has tried to keep in mind the taste of the *sahraday* (sensitive) who will search for the literary property as well in the text along with its interpretation in order to relish it from the bottom of the heart. It can be observed that the vocabulary therefore chosen by Munshī in his renderings of *Vaishnavjan to . . .* seems to be very simple, but sounding emotionally, technically and poetically very strong. In search of English equivalents for Gujarātī words, Munshī has gone for smaller words in their structure, but they have been fruitfully more effective to the readers. By allowing brevity - the soul of poetry, Munshī has carefully attempted not to sacrifice the meaning of the SL text. These intentional different purposes have resulted into two versions of *Vaishnavjan to . . .* into English. It may be perhaps possible that *Vaishnavjan to . . .* is significant to Munshī only as a literary property, whereas for Mahātmā, the same involves the social, ecclesiastical and anthropological property metaphorically difficult for a layman to interpret. To Mahātmā, *Vaishnavjan to . . .* is not simply a literary text, but is an echo of the Indian society, religion, Hinduism and above all a poem disguising the message of social reformation by attempting to talk about "Vaishnavjan" offering fraternity and equal status to all people of India as one society. True that even today, Narsinh's *Vaishnavjan to . . .* is very often sung and performed as a tribute to Mahātmā in various contexts as a part

of celebration related to the culture of India and, in the process, the religious song *Vaishnavjan* to . . . successfully tries to build peace in India.

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