

---

## Translating Historical Texts: Strategies, Issues and Perspectives

---

**Irshad Ahmad Parray**

Research Scholar

Department of English

Aligarh Muslim University

---

### Abstract

Translation has always bridged the gap across cultures and nations. It is through translation that world becomes a place where the voices of different people and places meet at one point. History of different nations would have been unknown to the world if not translated. Similarly, the rich history of people and places represents the culture and identity of a particular nation. In the postcolonial setting, writing back has become one of the trends to reclaim the past and at the same time resisting the dominant languages and literatures. The cross-cultural interaction between the different social groups has become an important factor in reclaiming and redefining the marginalized identities. In Indian context, translations of regional texts become important due to the multilingual and multicultural nature of the country. Moreover, translating literary, cultural and historical texts have the political overtones as well as the academic significance. The discussion of this paper is on the topics/contents translated by the author from the book Nawabeen Awadh Aur East India Company (Siyasi Rishtay) written by Dr. Mustafa Hussain Nizami in 1995. The translation done by the author was a part of the workshop Under UGC SAP DRS-11 conducted by the Department of English, AMU. The study aims to highlight the importance and relevance of the book in general and the translated topics/contents in particular. Secondly, the paper discusses the theoretical notions applied by the translator while translating these topics from English into Urdu. The study explores in detail the issues and challenges encountered by the translator in the process of translation. Finally, the study has revealed the various problems related to the equivalence at the linguistic and cultural level.

**Keywords:** Cross-cultural communication, culture, issues and challenges, problems etc.

### Introduction

Mini Krishnan who has a long experience in translation and publishing provide a good reason why there is a need of translations of Indian literature into different languages. She states "Why do I publish translations of Indian writing? Because in them lie our own histories, our sense of identity and belonging. Because we need to breathe our native breath. Because it is our historical duty in a largely illiterate country to preserve our word worlds and slow their disappearance" (Krishnan). Thus, translation is not just transferring words/message from one language into other. But it is bridging the gap between two cultures and nations. The paradigm shift in 1990's from linguistic to cultural turn in translation has changed the discourse of translation to the wider perspectives. Translation has played a vital role in understating different cultural diversities across nations and states. It is through translation that intercultural communication is possible. To highlight this fact, Azurda states, "The importance of the art of translation can be grasped by the fact that if Socrates, Plato and Aristotle had not been translated into other languages, the world, except for Greece, would have been a poor place." (57) Translation has made possible the comparative study of literatures across cultures and languages.

The transmission of knowledge, culture, history and philosophy is disseminated through translation. In India, the practice of translation can be traced back in the ancient times. The period witnessed some of the main translations from Sanskrit language into many Indian regional languages. The important texts translated into regional languages in the ancient period were Mahabharata and Ramayana. But the practice of translation largely flourished during the time of British rule in India. In the colonial times, there were translations between the languages to nationalize the Indian literature to unite people. With the help of these translations, a spirit of patriotism was instilled in the minds of the people. For instance, Tagore's works were largely translated into various regional languages. "The translation between Indian languages during the period of the freedom struggle was no more just a literary exercise; it helped in the building of a nation." (Satchidanandan 3) Translating a text from one language into another unravels a new world of knowledge, people and culture. It offers us a better understanding of people and their living style. Thus, translator acts as a "cultural broker" who unlocks the new realities and experiences. (Mukherjee 125) It reveals before us a new world in the form of food, dress code, festivals, marriage system, climate differences etc. This kind of exposition develops among us the mutual respect towards other cultures.

### **Nawabeen-i- Awadh Aur East India Company: Siyasi Rishtay: An Introduction**

The text Nawabeen Awadh Aur East India Company (Siyasi Rishtay) written by Dr. Mustafa Hussain Nizami in 1995 is the rarest document on the history of Awadh. The book has 132 topics including foreword and introduction. The book has a great significance as far as the Nawabas of Awadh, its cities, people and the political relations of Nawabs and other rulers at that time. The book chronicles almost all the events during the reign of Nawabs in Awadh from 1722-1859. It gives us a profound knowledge about the rulers of Awadh like Burhan-ul- Mulk, Shuja-ud-duala, Asif-ud-Duala, Wazir Ali, Saadat Ali Khan etc. The information related to the accession of these rulers, the personal information related to their marriage, child, dress, habits and death. The book documents the valuable information about the various battles/wars and invasions at that time. It briefs us about the various battles fought with the Marathas, Afghans, Jats. Similarly, the victories and defeats of Nawabas with Afghans are mentioned in the book. The invasions of Nadir Shah Durani on India are also included in the book.

The book is of great importance as far as the colonization of British is concerned against the Muslim rulers in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. It highlights the political relations of Nawabs of Awadh with the East India Company. It recounts all the incidents and agreements that how the British interferes in the administrative affairs of Nawabs. The different tactics which the East India Company employed at that time to weaken the Nawabs of Awadh are some of the great lessons to learn for the administrative purpose. The involvement of Nawabs of Awadh in the extravagant activities and their failure to run the administration also raises some of the important questions about their leadership qualities. These facts make one understand the reasons behind the culmination of Nawabs of Awadh.

Most importantly the book is an important document to know about the cultural assimilation between Indians and the British. How the interaction between the Nawabs of Awadh and the British influenced each other in their cultural development?

Thus, the book raises many questions about the colonial past of British and their deceptive civilizing mission in India and particularly in Awadh. Their nefarious designs are some of the important lessons for the present generation to resist their past glory of India and Awadh.

Translated Contents/topics

I have translated various contents from the book like "Tareek Awadh", "Faizabad Ki Binyaad", "Bayees Wain Paltan Ki Burbadi", "Angrazun Ki Awadh Main Mudakhalat", "Lord CornWallis Aur Awadh". The topics are important as far as the landscape, resources and the administrative system of Awadh were prevalent at that time.

The contents make us familiar with different facts about the history and the political relationship between the Nawabs and the British. They expose the hidden agendas of British in India. The interference in the internal affairs of administration teaches us many lessons about the colonial rule in India. The contents have a great significance of the rich tradition of Muslim history, culture and identity in Awadh and its adjoining areas.

The topic “Tareekhi Awadh” tells us some of the important facts about the history of Awadh. It documents some of the important facts about the difference between the old and new Awadh at the time of Mughal rule in India. Its landscape, environment and area are clearly being mentioned in the book. There is also some important information about the Mughal rulers, their role in administration. The relationship of Awadh rulers with the local heads of the state. How Saadat Khan, the first Nawab tried to strengthen his governance by extending his friendship with the local heads of Awadh? The topic “Bayees Wain Paltan Ki Burbadi”, informs us about the treatment of Nawabs towards the Army at the time of Shuj-ud-daula. The other contents are equally important as they tell us about the political relationships of British with the Nawabs. It shows how the British started interfering in the administrative matters of Nawabs. How British were loyal towards their own company and started disobeying the orders of the Nawabs in the administration. In the topic “Lord Cornwallis Aur Awadh” reveals the hidden agendas of East India Company. The topic clearly highlights the different strategies to weaken the administration of Awadh. The different agreements between the British and the Nawabs are being written in the topic. It shows how Lord Cornwallis the governor general at that time started to exploit the Asif-ud-daula in administrative affairs. All these strategies reveal the hidden motives of British government to consolidate their rule in India.

### **Translation of Historical Texts: Issues and Approaches**

The common focal point in translation of any text is its equivalence from the source language into the target language. But from different theories and debates of translation the possibility of ultimate equivalence in any text particularly historical, cultural and literary text is impossible. Similarly, translation of any historical text raises the problems at the linguistic and cultural level. This paper applies the theoretical notions of Peter Newmark on translation and also keeping in view the postcolonial theory of translation.

Peter Newmark while discussing the process of translation brings into discourse the language functions given by Bühler and Roman Jakobson. He shows the relationship between language functions and different translation methods as an important factor for a translator to reach at the level where she/he can understand the different nuances of a text. Newmark shows that a process of translation depends in knowing the type of text and its different functions. Peter Newmark's categorization of translation into semantic and communicative translation has a close relationship between the different text types. His classification of texts into three types i.e., expressive, informative and vocative texts are very crucial for semantic and communicative translation. He believes that semantic translation applies in expressive texts while as communicative translation applies in vocative and informative texts. Although there is huge difference between semantic and communicative translation but both the methods can be used simultaneously. As pointed out by Newmark “There is no one communicative nor one semantic method of translating a text—these are in fact widely overlapping bands of methods. A translation can be more, or less, semantic—more, or less, communicative—even a particular section or sentence can be treated more communicatively or less semantically” (40). Thus, for a historical text communicative translation is an appropriate method to translate the information from the source text into the target text. However, the semantic translation can be used wherever possible as discussed above by Peter Newmark.

In postcolonial setting, translation of a historical text has a lot of importance for the cross-cultural communication. It redefines the marginal identities which are unknown to the world. It enriches the vast understanding of any particular people or community.

Thus, in postcolonial setting translation is deliberately attempted to offer a fresh knowledge which have been controlled by some selected readings.

The issue of language and culture is taken seriously by translators. Translation of any historical text can pose similar problems as that of a literary text. At the linguistic level a translator has to struggle a lot by conveying the exact information from the source text. The language should be as clear and precise as possible. Since it is a historical text there should be no ambiguity at the level of language and content. At the cultural level a translator has to be very careful in translating the various cultural elements related to food, environment, weather, dress etc. It needs a sharp understanding for a translator to translate these cultural elements.

### Process of Translation

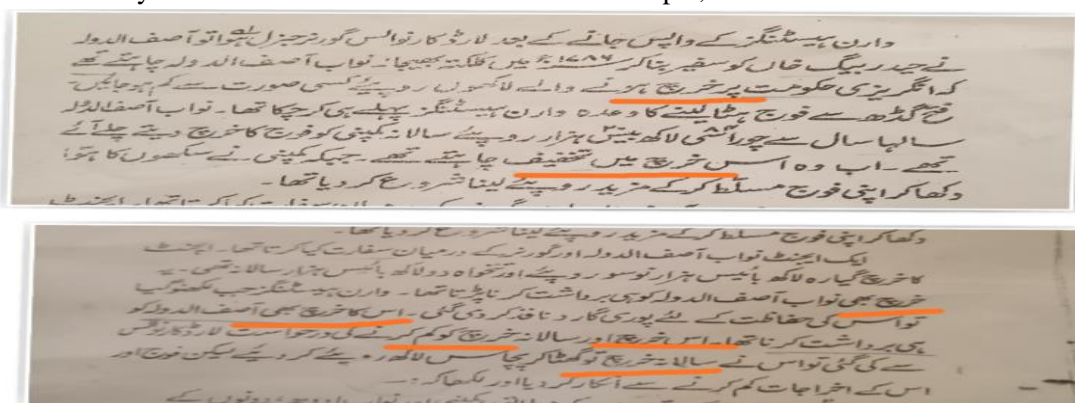
The text Nawabeen Awadh Aur East India Company (Siyasi Rishtay) written by Dr. Mustafa Hussain Nizami in 1995 is the rarest document on the history of Awadh. I have translated various contents from the book like "Tareek Awadh", "Faizabad Ki Binyaad", "Bayees Wain Paltan Ki Burbadi", "Angrazun Ki Awadh Main Mudakhalat", "Lord CornWallis Aur Awadh". The topics are important as far as the landscape, resources and the administrative system of Awadh was prevalent at that time. Following are the steps which I have followed during the process of translation:

- (a) First of all, I read the text carefully, tried to comprehend the text, context and its background.
- (b) Then I started translating the text without worrying about the equivalence. During translation I encountered some difficult words and sentences. I tried to know the meaning of these words and sentences from dictionary and other sources like Internet.
- (c) In my first draft, I did not pay attention whether the meaning is conveyed fully or not. Until I translated the whole topics. Then in my later drafts, I tried to understand the various aspects of the text at the linguistic and cultural level. I discussed some of the words and sentences with my friends. There were some concepts which I discussed with my friends.
- (d) I had to revise my drafts many times before I got satisfied.
- (e) Finally, I decided the strategy of translation to be employed during translation.

### Problems Encountered

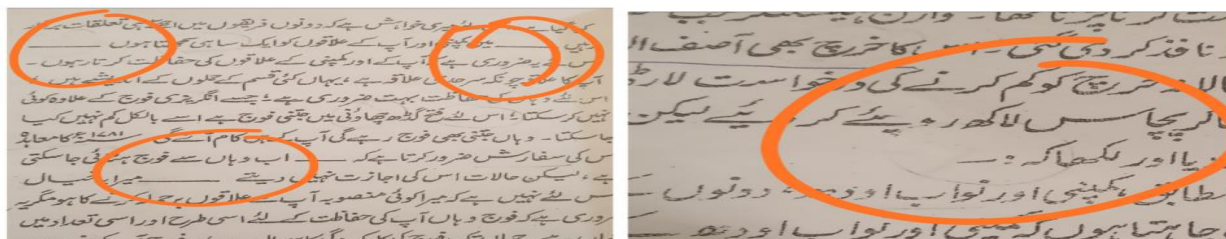
While translation, I encountered some problems which are as follows:

- (1) During translation process, there were some words which I could not understand. Hence, it was difficult for me to translate them into the target language. For example, Tiloyi, Inhona, Parganu, Sheikh Zadun, Ghadyaan, Bayeesvi, Bahu Begum, Aamil, Resident.
- (2) During translation, I faced some words in the source language text which have been used again and again in the source text. While translating them in different contexts, I was confused whether I should use the same word as already used or find another word. For Example, the word Kharach from the below text.





(iii) There was a problem with the punctuation marks. I had to know the different types of punctuation marks used in the source text. But I was confused which punctuation marks I should use in the target text. For example, from the text below:



(iv) I faced problems in translating the long sentences. I had to break them into small sentences for clarity of meaning.

#### Strategies Employed during Translation

(v) Foreignization and domestication strategies were employed. For example, in case of foreignization (Aamil, Resident, Platoon, Sheikh Zadun, Ghandakh, and Bayeesvi) words have been retained.

(iv) Omission was done at the level of punctuation. For instance, dashes and other punctuation marks were omitted.

(vi) Footnotes were also used for some words and references.

#### Conclusion

To conclude, we can say that translation of any text is a very difficult job. It requires a deep knowledge of both the source language and the target language. Translating the historical text makes the job of a translator more challenging because of the factual information. Any negligence on the part of a translator can be dangerous. Moreover, a translator has to be aware about the current trends of translation. He should read the some of the translated texts of history to know the style.

#### References:

- Azur M. Zaman. "Translation: Its Importance, Usefulness and Problems." Approaches to literary translation. Ed. G R Malik and Mohammad Amin. Srinagr: P.G Department of English, 2002. Print.
- Hussain, Mustafa. Nawabeen Awadh Aur East India Company (Siyasi Rishtay), 1995. Print.
- Krishnan, Mini "Why I publish translations of Indian literature" Scroll.in, 17 Jan. Sept.2015. Web.
- Mukherjee, Sujit. "Translation as Patriotism." Translation as Discovery and Other Essays on Indian Literature in English Translation. Rep. ed. Hyderabad: Orient Longman.2006 Print.
- Newmark, Peter. Approaches to Translation. Phoenix ELT, 1995.
- Nizami, Mustafa Hussain. Nawabeen-e-Awadh Aour East India Company: Siyasi Rishtey. Bareilly: Raza Barqi Press. 1995.
- Prasad, G.J.V., Interview with Pratiksha Thanki, Broda Times, 18<sup>th</sup> April, 2005.
- Satchidanandan. K. "Do you Understand Me? The Culture of Translation in India." Translating Bharat: Reading India. Ed. Neetu Gupta. Mumbai: Yatra Books, 2016. 1-8.