

## SOME PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATING EARLY JAINA TEXTS\*

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Jaina works could be ancient, or pre-medieval, early medieval and later ones. They also could be mainly in Prakrit and Sanskrit. Translating these works in English, an act which must precede serious Jinistic studies, has to face several problems. I shall here prefer to restrict discussion to the problems of translating into English the early Prakṛta texts, namely canonical, exegetical and other cognate works.

The history of translation of early Jaina Prakṛta texts into English, unlike that of the Saṃskṛt and Pāli ones, is neither far long nor far wide. Hermann Jacobi's English translation of the *Ācārāṅga-sūtra* and the *Kalpa-sūtra* (Sacred books of the East, Vol. XXII, 1884) and next of the *Uttarādhyayana-sūtra* and the *Sūtraṭṭāṅga* (S. B. E. Vol. XL, 1895) can be said to be the pioneering and systematically planned work in this field. Thereafter the translations of early Jaina Prakṛta texts—some complete, some in part and some in contextual form,—have been produced now and then by foreign<sup>1</sup> and Indian scholars, the recent notable attempts being by scholars like Taiken Honaki and K. C. Lalwani. In between Jacobi and the last-noted two scholars stand those like Hoernle, Barnett, Schubring, K. V. Abhyankar, A. N. Upadhye, H. B. Gandhi, N. V. Vaidya and a few other scholars. Taking a bird's eye-view of all such attempts we find that we as yet have not been able to arrive at the complete translation of even the main canonical texts into English, let away be that of the exegetical and other ones. Bringing out thorough critical editions of these texts and their English translation has been a long-awaited desideratum, without the achievement of which the prospects of Jaina studies in the Western and other foreign Universities are bleak.

For translating an early Prakṛta text it is essential that we must have its critical edition. We so far possess critical editions of only a few canonical works. As regards translating the exegetical literature, this is yet to begin. — But waiting too long for the critical editions of all these texts would considerably retard the translation task. It is hence advisable that efforts toward translating may go ahead, at present with the available editions of the texts.

The translator of course should be well equipped with the basic tools of the job—a good knowledge of Prakṛta grammar and lexicon of Jaina dogmatics, doctrines and philosophy of the concerned religio-historical and socio-cultural background<sup>2</sup>, with ability to institute comparative studies<sup>3</sup>, besides his possessing a more than ordinary command over English language. He has carefully to take

into consideration the archaic and pithy nature of Prākṛta language and the peculiar style found in some of the texts.<sup>4</sup>

Though the text is in prose, at times the meaning in the English translation has to be supplemented with additional words put in brackets or with notes added at the foot. Otherwise clear expressivity of thought or idea cannot always be achieved in the translation.

Many a times a literal translation in English does not bring home the intended sense of the original text. In such context we have to honour, partly or wholly, the following dictum : A true translation should strike a balance between fidelity and creativity, between interpretation and objectivity.<sup>5</sup> Let me extend an example within my own experience : A literal translation of a line, सो धम्मो जत्थ दया<sup>6</sup> would be : That is religion where there is compassion. But, for clarity, I would render it as follows : *That is a true religion which has compassion as its basis.*

In the case of *Sūtras* we have to resort rather to the method of free translation, which is termed as 'अयानुवाद' by some scholars. Otherwise it is difficult to arrive at the intended meaning of the original. If the text is in verse the task of translating becomes still harder. A metrical translation in English demands a special qualification of English metrics, poetics and vocabulary on the part of the translator. Hence the translation in prose of such verified texts normally fares better. But when the Prākṛta text is just a contextual metrical portion by way of quotation of a verse or a few verses, one can translate them in free verse, which can bring variety and beauty to such work. I have carried in my studies this experiment at such contexts. The following verse and its rendering in free verse may be noted :

खम्मामि सब्ब जीवाणं सब्बे जीवा खमंतु मे ।  
मेत्ती मे सब्बभूदेसु वेरं मज्झं ण केण वि ॥<sup>7</sup>

I do forgive all beings ever;  
May they forgive me too so !  
Let me love one and all for sure,  
Let me be an enemy of none !<sup>8</sup>

Such technique of translating in free verse can also be fruitfully used in the case of Prākṛta lyrical verses and religious ballads. I have rendered the entire 22nd Chapter, namely the *Rahanemiḥjam*, in the *Uttarādhyaṇa-sūtra*, in English free verse, free quatrain<sup>9</sup>, one or two of which can be reproduced

(39)<sup>10</sup>

Rajimati noted Rahanemi's mind disturbed,  
And (so also) his exertion defeated;  
Losing not her presence of mind,  
Her own self there she defended.

(40)

That daughter of the great King,  
Steadfast in her restraint and vows,  
Protecting the honour of her clan  
And of family and virtue, spoke to him :

(41)

Were you handsome like Vaiśramaṇa,  
Were you pleasing like Nalakūbera,  
And the very Purandara incarnate were you,  
I should have no desire for you.

At times we have to adjust the translation to the genius of the English expression while choosing a word or a phrase for the corresponding Prākṛta one in the original text. I was, a few days back, rendering the गोम्मट-शुद्धि<sup>1</sup> and could not be satisfied with the literal rendering of the last recurring line of the verses in the hymn, namely.

तं गोम्मटेसं पणमामि णिज्जं ।

by using 'bow' or 'bow down' for 'पणमामि', for it did not bring down the due sense of the original Prākṛta word, nor did it suit the English expression. After some serious thinking, the following translation struck to my mind and to my satisfaction :

*Before that Gommateśa ever I kneel !<sup>1 2</sup>*

These are some of the problems, surely not exhaustive, of translating early Jaina works into English, discussed in general and also in the light of my own experiments. German scholars, as noted above, have been pioneers in translating into English the early Jaina texts, as also they have been so in Jaina studies in general. Then some other foreign and Indian scholars have tried their hands, now and then, at this work. It is high time that some more Indian scholars should come forward to take up this work on a systematized plan, so that it can encourage the Jaina studies among the Westerners as well as among those using English as medium in their higher learning.

### Notes and References

- \* A summarised and revised version of thoughts presented at the 'Symposium on the Problems of Translating the Jaina Works', held at the P. V. Research Institute, Varanasi, in March 1981.
- 1. (i) For some more details in this regard, one can go through N. M. Tatia's (1) A Random Selection of Researches in Jainology by Foreigners, *Tulsi Prajñā*, Vol. V, Nos 9-10, and (2) A further Selection of the Researches by Foreigners, *Tulsi Prajñā*, Vol. V, Nos. 11-12.

(ii) We can also note in this context that some attempts of translating the early Jaina Prākṛta texts into German, French, Italian and Japanese languages also have been made.

2. Vide Jacobi's translation of जमोकामो as 'famous knight', *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XLV, 1895, p. 118.
3. Vide Alsdorf's translation of वंतं इच्छसि आवेउं" (*Uttarādhyāyanaśūtra*, XXII, V. 42) as 'you intend to re-enter worldly life', in '*Vāntam Āpētum*': *Kleine Schriften*, Glasenapp Stiftung, Band 10, Wiesbaden 1974, pp. 178-185.
4. After seeing some raw attempts at translating and elucidating some Jaina canonical verses and passages, I feel like remarking, after the manner of Hāla, as follows :

अमयं खलु जिणवयणं सम्मगत्यं जे न याणंति ।  
अणुवाय-कज्जं पि कुणंति कह ते सज्जवंति ॥

"The words of the Jina are indeed like ambrosia. Those who do not know their right meaning but venture to translate them, how can they fare well ?"

5. As concluded by the 'Poet-translators' Workshop' organized at Bhopal by the National Sāhitya Academy in September 1976.
6. The citation is from the *Niyamasāra-ṭīkā* (I. 6) of Padmaprabha.
7. The *Mūlācāra*, V. 43.
8. The *Vaḍḍārādhane* : a study, Dharwad 1979, p. 148.
9. To be published shortly.
10. The number of the *gāhā* in the Chapter.
11. ( i ) Attributed to Ācārya Nemicaṇḍra.  
(ii) I am aware that he belongs to the tenth century A. D.; however, I am quoting the translation by way of an example.
12. The versified translation of the hymn, with introduction and critical notes, is to be published shortly.