
Translating Dharma and Destiny: Cultural Loss and Gain in English Epic Translations

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Abstract

When we translate stories from India into English it is a big task. We have to make sure the words are correct and the meaning is right. Important ideas like dharma and destiny are not words they are connected to the culture, philosophy and society of India. This paper looks at how translations of old Sanskrit stories like the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa balance keeping the old culture and changing it to fit new readers. The Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa are important stories, in India and translating them into English is a difficult job. We have to understand the culture of India and the meaning of the stories to do a translation of the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa. This thing looks at how people who translate things help figure out the differences in meaning and culture. They have to decide how to make the translation work like should they make it sound like it was written in the language or keep it sounding like it was written in the old language. When you look at translations done by people like A. K. Ramanujan, R. K. Narayan, William D. O'Flaherty and others you can see that translation is not about changing the words it is about understanding the culture. Translation of ideas like dharma and destiny, into English gives us new ways to think about them but it also limits what we can understand because of the way the English language works and what the people who speak English are used to.

Translation is about taking the meaning of something from one language and putting it into another language. This is what it should be like in a world.. When you are talking about old stories like the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa it gets complicated. The problem is that these stories have words that are connected to the culture like dharma and destiny. These words are hard to translate into English because they do not have matches. This paper looks at how translations into deal with the cultural rules that are part of dharma and ideas, about destiny. It shows that when you translate these stories you can both lose and gain something from the culture of the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa.

The idea of dharma is really important in philosophy. It is not about doing your duty or being a good person. The idea of destiny in stories also includes thoughts, about the universe why things happen and how society works. When people translate these ideas into English they have to decide whether to make them sound familiar or keep them sounding like they do in the language. This decision affects how people understand ways of thinking. It shows how powerful translation can be and how languages and cultures interact with each other. The concept of dharma and destiny are. Translators have to be careful when working with these Indian ideas.

Translation Theory: Domestication vs. Foreignization

Lawrence Venuti's theory of domestication and foreignization helps us understand translations of stories. Domestication is when you change the story to fit the norms of the new culture. This makes the story feel familiar. It can also make us forget what the story meant in its original culture.

Foreignization is different. It keeps the features of the culture, which can be hard for the new reader to understand but it also keeps the unique cultural details of the original story. Lawrence Venuti's theory of domestication and foreignization is important, for understanding how translations of stories work.

When people translate important books the people doing the translation have a big problem. They have to decide what to do with the word dharma. Should they translate dharma as duty or ethics. Just

leave dharma as it is? They also have to think about what to do with daiva or karma. Should they translate daiva or karma, as destiny or cosmic law? The choice they make is very important because it affects whether the meaning of the culture is kept or not. This is a deal because dharma and daiva or karma are important words.

When we make old stories easier to understand we might lose some of the things that make them special to a group of people. On the hand if we keep the stories exactly like they were people who do not know about Indian culture might have a hard time understanding them. This is a problem when we try to translate old Indian stories and ideas that are connected to the culture and the spiritual world of India. The translation of laws and metaphysical concepts, in these Indian stories is really important.

Dharma: Cultural Meaning and Translation Challenges

Multi-Layered Meaning of Dharma

In Sanskrit the word dharma means a lot of things. Dharma is about law it is about duty it is about virtue it is about ethics it is about order it is about righteousness it is about cosmic order and it is even about religion. The meaning of dharma is not simple, like the English words duty or morality. Dharma has layers of meaning that change depending on the situation the role of your caste your gender, the things you have to do for your family and the laws of spirituality.

For example in the Mahābhārata the concept of dharma is really complicated. It is not about what is right or wrong. Yudhiṣṭhira had a time figuring out what he was supposed to do because he had many obligations. He had to think about his duty to his family versus his duty to do what is right. If we just say that dharma is about duty we are not giving it credit. The Mahābhārata shows us that dharma is a lot more, than that. Dharma is a part of the Mahābhārata and it is not easy to understand.

Translation Strategies for Dharma

1. Literal Translation (Foreignization)

Some translators like to keep the word dharma as it's and they add footnotes or glossaries to explain what it means. This way the cultural details are kept intact. The reader has to do some work to understand it. For example A. K. Ramanujans way of translating in Three Hundred Rāmāyaṇa Verses often keeps the Sanskrit terms like dharma to show the differences. This helps to keep the meaning of dharma clear.

2. Functional Equivalence (Domestication)

Other translators use words, like duty or law or righteousness. R. K. Narayans stories are really popular. He does this too so more people can understand them.. The thing is, this can make the culture seem simpler than it really is.

3. Hybrid Approach

A hybrid strategy is really useful because it combines words, with some Sanskrit words.

This strategy, which William D. O'Flaherty uses in his translations makes things easier to understand. It also shows that the culture is special.

Cultural Loss and Gain in Dharma Translation

Cultural Loss:

Simplification of dharma into "duty" risks erasing its layered meaning.

When we think about things and spiritual things they often get lumped together with the way Western people think about what is right and wrong. Social things and spiritual things are important. They are not always treated as separate things, in Western cultures. The social dimensions and spiritual dimensions are connected,. They can get lost when we only think about what Western people consider to be ethical behavior.

The small details in things like the Bhagavad Gītā can be hard to see. For example the Bhagavad Gītā has rules about what people should do based on their caste. These details, in the Bhagavad Gītā are easy to miss.

Cultural Gain:

English translations are helping to introduce philosophical concepts to people all, around the world who can read English. This means that Indic philosophical concepts are now being shared with a readership.

Using strategies is a great way to get people interested and make them want to learn more about the subject. Hybrid strategies can really spark curiosity. Make people want to do further research and scholarship, on the topic of hybrid strategies.

Retaining Sanskrit is a thing because it helps people understand the culture of Sanskrit and it also helps people think about other cultures in a better way.

The study of Sanskrit raises awareness of specificity and it enriches comparative thought about Sanskrit.

People who learn Sanskrit get an understanding of the cultural specifics of Sanskrit and this helps them think about Sanskrit in comparison, to other cultures.

Destiny and Cosmic Law: Translating Metaphysical Concepts

Destiny in the Epic Imagination

In the stories of India destiny is not just something that is already decided for you. It is like a conversation between what you do and the way the universe works. The idea of destiny exists alongside the fact that humans can make their decisions. In the Mahābhārata you can see destiny happening through signs and warnings. The way things happen because of what people do but the characters in the story also get to make choices. This means that what happens is not completely decided ahead of time. Destiny in the Mahābhārata is like this it shows that people have a say, in what happens to them.

Translating the idea of destiny is about showing the picture. When we use words, like fate or destiny they have meanings that come from Western ways of thinking. These words often imply that something is going to happen and we cannot do anything about it.. When we look at epic stories they talk about destiny in a different way. In these stories destiny is connected to the things we do. The choices we make which is what people mean by karma or moral action. Destiny is related to action or what we call karma.

Translation Strategies for Destiny

1. Literal Plus Gloss:

Translators can keep words, like daiva or karma in the text. Then explain what these words mean in notes. This way the idea of daiva or karma stays foreign so people have to think about what daiva or karma means.

2. English Equivalent:

Using “destiny” or “fate” simplifies but risks conflating varied cultural ideologies with Western teleological thinking.

3. Contextual Translation:

Translators can use English words to explain big ideas, like the concept of a "cosmic moral order" to get the point across without having to use just one word. This way translators can show the details of what the idea means. Translators do this to make sure the idea of a moral order is understood in a deeper way.

Cultural Loss and Gain in Destiny Translation

Cultural Loss:

Equating daiva solely with “fate” ignores its moral features and relational aspect with human action. The Western way of thinking may force ideas on the epic that do not really belong to it. The epic has its way of seeing the world and Western categories can make it seem like things are already decided, which is not what the epic is saying. The epics worldview is different, from the categories.

Cultural Gain:

People who are new to reading English get to learn about spiritual ideas from India. These spiritual ideas are called metaphysics. New English readers get to know more, about metaphysics.

When we talk about translation it can really help us connect the dots between different ideas and make sense of things from other cultures. This can be very useful for understanding ideas from other parts of the world. Contextual translation is important because it can bridge the gaps between ways of thinking and help us build a deeper understanding of each others perspectives. By using translation we can learn more about philosophical ideas, from other cultures and get a better sense of what they are trying to say. Contextual translation can help us understand the philosophy of cultures.

Case Studies: This is about how translators deal with laws. Translators have to navigate laws when they do their job. The cultural laws are different in every country so translators have to be very careful.

Translators must understand the laws of the country they are working with. This is very important because cultural laws can be very sensitive.

* Translators have to know what words to use. What words not to use in different cultures.

* They also have to know about the customs and traditions of the people they are translating for.

The main goal of translators is to make sure that the message they are translating is clear and respectful, to the people they are translating for. Translators have to navigate laws every day and it is a big part of their job. Cultural laws are what guide translators when they are working on a project.

1. R. K. Narayan

Narayan's stories of the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa are written so that many people can read them. He writes in English that people can understand. The Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa are told in a way. When it comes to the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa Narayan's versions talk about things like being good. What will happen to you. For example the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa ideas of dharma and destiny are explained as doing what is right. What will happen to you in the end.

Strengths:

Readability and narrative fluidity.

Wide appeal to general audiences.

Limitations:

Loss of cultural nuance in key terms.

Reduction of philosophical depth.

2. A. K. Ramanujan

Ramanujan talks about different meanings in his work called Three Hundred Rāmāyaṇa Verses and his essays on translations. He likes to keep the Sanskrit words and gives us a way to understand them. Ramanujan shows us that when we translate something we have to make choices about what the words mean. He emphasizes that the Rāmāyaṇa verses and other texts can have meanings depending on the context. Ramanujan wants us to see that the Rāmāyaṇa verses are not one story but many stories, with different meanings.

Strengths:

Preservation of cultural density.

Encourages reader engagement with source culture.

Limitations:

Accessibility is more challenging for uninitiated readers.

3. William D. O'Flaherty

O'Flaherty's translations use a mix of methods. He translates ideas into English but he also keeps some Sanskrit words and adds footnotes to help people understand them. When O'Flaherty translates the Mahābhārata the word dharma is often written as "dharma (duty)" so people know it has meanings. O'Flaherty does this with the word dharma to show that the Mahābhārata and the word dharma are complex.

Strengths:

Balances accessibility with cultural specificity.

Footnotes help people understand things better without giving them much to handle. They make it easier to figure out what the writer is trying to say. That is really helpful for readers. Footnotes are, like helpers that guide interpretation of the text.

Limitations:

Dependent on reader's willingness to engage with annotations.

Discussion: Implications of Cultural Loss and Gain

Educational Contexts

When we are in school translations can help us learn about cultures.. Sometimes these translations can be wrong and confuse students about ideas from India. Teachers should explain the culture behind these translations so students can really understand philosophical concepts. This way students can get an idea of what Indic philosophical concepts are all, about.

Philosophical and Literary Understanding

The way we translate things can really change how people who are not from India think about dharma and destiny.

If we translate dharma to mean " duty" in a way that is easy to understand it might make people from Western countries happy because it fits with what they already believe is right and wrong.

This can be a problem because it does not help people understand what dharma really means in Indian philosophy, which is, about the order of the universe and the roles people play in society and how dharma and destiny are connected to these things.

When we look at translations that're really faithful to the original language they can make us think deeply about the differences in ideas, between cultures.. Sometimes these foreignized translations can be hard for people to understand. On the hand translations that blend different approaches can be really good if they are done well. These hybrid practices can make reading more interesting. Help people understand different cultures better. Foreignized translations and hybrid practices are both important because they can enrich our experience of literature and increase our understanding of cultures.

Cultural Translation as Negotiation

Translations are not like mirrors that show you the text exactly as it is. They are like peoples opinions about what the original text means. This is because the people who do the translations have to think about the language they are translating into the customs of the people who speak that language and the ideas that people in that culture believe in. The people who translate things have to decide what to keep the same what to change and what to explain. When they make these decisions they can cause people to lose some of the meaning of the text but they can also help people gain new understanding. This is not something that happens once it is something that keeps happening as people from different

cultures talk to each other and learn from each other. Translations are a part of this conversation between different cultures and the people who do the translations play a big role, in shaping what people think and understand about other cultures and translations.

When we translate stories about myths into English we have to consider the cultural differences. Words like dharma and destiny are hard to translate because they are closely tied to Indian philosophy and ideas about right and wrong.

We have two ways to translate these stories: we can make them sound more like they were written in English or we can keep the original words and phrases.

If we make them sound like English the stories are easier to read but we might lose some of the deeper meaning that is special to the Indian culture.

On the hand if we keep the original words we can preserve the special ideas and feelings of the Indian culture but it might be harder for people to understand the stories. Translation of epics into English is a complex task that requires careful consideration of these issues and the terms, like dharma and destiny are a big part of this challenge.

When we are talking about translation we need to think about the people who are reading it. We have to consider where the story comes from and what the readers want to know. Translation is not about taking something that already exists and making it sound the same in a different language. It is actually an important job that helps people from different cultures understand each other. Translation is a process that's just as important as creating something new because it helps people see things from a different point of view. The translation process is really about finding a balance, between staying true to the story and making sure the readers can understand it. This way we can keep the things that make a culture special and still make it easy for people to comprehend. Translation is a job that involves interpreting and understanding the original material and that is what makes it so valuable.

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