

## BI-CULTURAL EXPERIENCE OF READING TRANSLATED NOVEL *SOCRATES' FOOTSTEPS*

Megh Prasad Kharel

*The present article aims at examining a bicultural experience of reading of Govinda Raj Bhattarai's novel, Socrates' Footsteps written originally in Nepali and translated into English by Bal Ram Adhikari. To show biculturalism, the study includes some aspects of translation, such as equivalence, ambivalence and creative ego.*

**Keywords:** Ambivalence, biculturalism, creative ego, Englishes, homeland episode

### 1. Introduction

Leaving one's own homeland for the Anglo-community provides an opportunity to experience the bi-cultural context. However, what is more distinctive is living in one's own homeland and reading about own culture in the second language. I regard this as a distinctive type of bicultural experience that one can get through the translated text. I also felt such experience while reading Govinda Raj Bhattarai's novel *Socrates' Footsteps*, originally written in Nepali as 'Sukaratka Paila' and translated into English by Bal Ram Adhikari. The novel deals with political deterioration and dehumanization events such as kidnapping, arson, torture, threats, horror, brutality, torment, self-destruction and demise during the Maoist revolt period. These are the experiences of my nation and, more or less, mine too.

Translation, in general, is considered as a bilingual activity in which the socio-cultural meaning of one language is rendered into another language. It is a common fact that communication between two different linguistic groups is not viable without translation. Moreover, it also helps to spread one culture around the globe. In other words, it is a reliable means for intercultural communication by bridging the gap among the diverse communities with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In the same way, such an act also helps to transfer knowledge from one culture to another. Indeed, translation also weakens the communicative barrier between two cultures; communicates

message; spreads cultures and increases understanding among the neighborhoods near and far. We can assume that "intercultural communication is essentially a special skill" due to its nature of transference of the particular socio-cultural knowledge to the different readers (Nida, 2001, p. 4).

Against this backdrop, we can also read in *Socrates' Footsteps* the creative ego of translator's conscious or unconscious maneuver of national and regional sentiment as well as his intent of the promoting Englishes and Nepali-English writing beyond the borders. Furthermore, it immensely shows the characteristics of transferring ambivalence-based knowledge of current Nepali education system and also gives us an idea about the problematic results of equivalence in the bicultural context.

### 2. Creative ego, national and regional feeling

Both writer and translator are concerned with the Third World or the South-Asian setting in the global context. Accordingly, their knowledge of creative ego reflects "the unconscious" of the Eastern and the Third World-based locality, as the psychological capacity of "the unconscious is the product of the repression of instincts" (Segal, 2004, p. 102). Intentionally or unintentionally, the translator has also showed his knowledge of the cultural locality which he belongs to. When content of the translated text is reflected from the tussle between two cultures, conscious or unconscious mind of the translator, it shows the regional and national feeling. For instance, the use of *bandas, jestha, rote ping, uttis, chautara, lankuri, phuli, Ama, Ba, shrish, doko, mela, bhai, dai, ketos, yar, Baisakh, dhokhre, amala, lapsi, chilaune, resham phiriri, resham phiriri, janasarkar, loktantra, lalupate, kurta salwar, santras, lajjawati, parijat, janabadi, kharidar, bazaar, hajur, masala* etc. also indicate the freedom of the translator for self-choosing Nepali terms. At the same time, he has used some Sanskrit and Indian terms like *Hari Om Tas Tas, dharnas, gheraos, gudpak, Kalki Avatar* and

*babusahib*. In the case of selecting Nepali terms, it reveals that the creative ego of the translator has been consciously or unconsciously dominated by the Nepali nationalism. Moreover, space given to Sanskrit and Indian terms gives the idea that the translator also is illuminating the creative ego of the Eastern-based regional geography. The creative process of translation has enhanced the bicultural practice of Eastern and Western locations. Indeed, such a creative action deserves the reflection of certain voices and views of Third World texts.

### 3. Promoting Englishes and Nepali-English writing

Nepali issues written in English and Nepali writings translated into English obviously pertain to Nepali-English writing in the global context. Such activities of writing and translating are growing significantly in Nepal. In addition, Nepali-English writing shows that "English as a non-native, non-western writer" as his/her content of writing is concerned with Nepali history, culture, politics (Uprety, 2001, p. 223). As a student of English Studies, I see a sea change in the way of life of reading and writing in literatures in English because "cultural heritage" as well as linguistic credential of "specific people" of British and American people is no longer in "Englishes" (Pope, 2001, p.16). Moreover, Dingwaney (1999) finds that any translating work in metropolitan languages of the Third World culture is "imperative business" of creative manifestation (p.1). In other words, translation of culture from the Third World "can be better defined as a politics of translating" the Third World cultural values and identity. Such creativeness of the translator offers our Third World tendency and privilege in front of the cosmopolitan publicity in order to comply with the tastes of the Western metropolitan readers. Besides, Ahmad (1992) opines that "ideology" of "Third World Literature" is the "first world's construction" (p.43). The translated text of the Third World includes "a new set of categories within the larger conceptual category of Literature" in different universities of metropolitan cities at global level. In fact, it is also the ideology of the Third World to identify the socio-cultural values. This category of literature enhances global-based

notion of biculturalism and multiculturalism, as it is functioning within the circle of Western, non-Western, Asian, non-Asian as well as different neo-colonial and post-colonial communities. Such a technique of literary translation is concerned with translator's creative ego, which manifests that the translator is emotionally attached with nationalistic feeling of Nepali and the regional sentiment of the Eastern setting.

We also see that the national and regional sentiment of the translator is enhancing the intellectual discourse of glocalization. When a person goes beyond the ethnicity, nationalism, caste and religion, he/she is interacting with the global context and, at the same time, he/she cannot be detached from the local way of life either. In other words, global and local cultures are fused and, moreover, the activity of the individual becomes an inseparable aspect of glocalization. Emphasizing the amalgamation of global and local cultural values in the global communities, Robertson (1995) mentions "there is an increasingly globe-wide discourse of locality, community, home and the like[...] the idea of global culture is in terms of its being constituted by the increasing interconnected of many local cultures both large and small" (p. 477). In the process of glocalization, the creative ethos of the translated work has become a powerful apparatus, since it facilitates interaction between two different cultural circumstances. While reading, I found that local Nepali culture and language are intermingling with English global culture and, consequently, Nepali way of life has also become an integral part of globalism.

### 4. Transference of Nepali ambivalent education

While reading the translated novel, we find the characters working with inbetweenness of two different cultures. Inbetweenness, in general, refers to proximity of trans-culturalization, which is the collision of two different cultures as it designates the state of turmoil before the fusion of two cultures or languages. The characters such as Ananta, Purnima, Sukarat, Ravi, Chitrakhar and Bhaktaman are interacting in English, but these characters have lost their original and pure identity while entering into the new world of the foreign language. Indeed, the dominant features of

their local identity are lost and they are working in the ambivalence and cultural gap owing to their bicultural activities.

The chosen name, 'Sukarat', University professor, has been selected to make the equivalent image of a Greek philosopher, Socrates. According to Greek history of philosophy, Socrates was so great that he fearlessly accepted the death for his philosophical conviction. The reflection of the Greek philosopher, Socrates, in the Nepali context has a different role in the appearance of Sukarat. His role is so ambiguous that when his disciple, Ananta, chooses the path of self-destruction, his highly academic and philosophical views cannot stop doing so. Socrates in Greek was famous for his philosophical thought that could make an impression on the Greek society. But, Sukarat is helpless as his inspiration for Ananta to rejuvenate the life from the pessimistic state is futile. Following his philosophical thoughts is worthless: "We should live by hope, by zeal, by belief, by love, by faith. You too know these things. Ananta, come out of this cave of pessimism" (p.2010, p.170). In other words, credential of Sukarat in the Nepali context is typical in the sense that his idealistic views contradict with Ananta's nihilism and frustration. As a part of creative writing of literature in English, this translation marks a departure of thematic view from the Western English literary context.

Socrates' disciple, Ananta, is from the Eastern location. According to the Eastern tradition, the guru is considered a god. *GURU DEVO BHABHA* is a popular saying. What guru instructs becomes an absolute truth because guru and god never go out of the track and they never tell wrong to their disciples. Despite the traditional conviction, both guru and disciple have lost their identities in the new surroundings. In fact, our assumption of the guru-disciple hierarchy and the authoritative and instructive role of the guru both have been dismantled. The notion of Lyotard (1989) opines that "incredulity towards metanarrative," also more or less enhances to examine the representation of bicultural state (p. XXIV). Our traditional view of the guru is regarded as powerful and divine that portrays the metanarrative of the Eastern notion. But the

modern educational system has challenged such perceptions of the metanarrative.

Furthermore, Sukarat always throws his highly academic and philosophical notions, but Ananta's academic and philosophical sensitivity is not so high. Therefore, his academic thought has not instructed his student in a proper way in the new milieu. In this sense, both have lost their original identity of guru and disciple. The cultural and knowledge gap in the modern educational locale between them has resulted in incredulity in the metanarrative of traditional guru-disciple relationship. Neither Sukarat has stood in the position of traditional guru nor has Ananta followed the conventionally-orientated discipline. The *gurukuliya* education system, which is considered stricter in comparison to modern education is also being implicated here. In the new setting of university, both political regression and Maoist insurgency are such events that guru and disciple have ill-fated time to continue the traditional ideal norms and values. They neither suit the open Western-based education nor apt for *gurukuliya* idealism. In this way, translation has transferred such an ambivalent situation of Nepali education to English world. Sukarat and Ananta are victims of this ambivalent context of Nepali education.

##### 5. Equivalence and thick translation

In the process of translation, the source language (SL) to target language (TL) brings the situation of mix feeling. As a reader, we can see how "the translator has to deal with proverbs, idioms, clichés, nominal or adjectival phrases and the onomatopoeia of animal sounds" (Xu, 2016, p. 99). Lack of equivalence between two languages and cultures also shows the ambivalent situation while selecting the words, phrasal verbs and socio-cultural notions. In other words, we can see the limitation of both SL and TL. Indeed, cultural and linguistic gaps pose problem in maintaining equivalence. Thus, the translator is working inbetweenness of the two cultures. The reader who is reading the events concerned with his/her mother land in the foreign language (i.e. English) feels that he/she is losing the deterministic type of cultural and linguistic values. Even though the major purpose of the translation is to enhance the

communicative act between diverse linguistic and cultural groups of people, the outcome reveals that the problem in equivalence of bicultural context does not definitely allow such process.

In a similar vein, meaning is not fixed owing to bicultural gaps. Both translator and reader are participating in textual codes, images and other different linguistic facets in an ambiguous manner, as equivalence between SL and TL itself remains vague all the time. Although it is assumed that the reader "as the primary evaluator of translator quality, whose reaction to the TT or perception of the function and purpose of the message become decisive criteria for quality assessment", bicultural gaps make him/her puzzled to evaluate such quality (Xu, 2016, p. 101). So, the relationship between ST and TT is reflected not only in the objective involvement, but also is gauged from the perspective of a reader. The notion of reader response theory, as Fish (1988) opines, leads to relativism about the discerning of subjective responses because the subjective and objective dichotomy is interconnected and they have no survival in seclusion. The purity of both the subjective and the objective is deconstructed because they are also functioning with inbetweenness of the interpretative community.

Even though the TT suffers cultural gaps, the tentative meaning is fixed with the interaction, involving the text and the reader. Such tentativeness is the outcome of the ambiguity in the equivalence of biculturalism. Xu (2016) agrees, in a theoretical sense, that "representation of a concrete meaning or truth via textual realization is impossible" (p.102) in the case of bicultural experience. Although certain inference is resulted from the interaction between reader's discernment and translated text, the degree of equivalence and ambiguity is also equally noteworthy. In this way, the translated version reveals the different ways of rendering in the sense that it causes different responses from the different readers. Against this backdrop, Appiah (2004) has emphasized the concept of "thick translation" that "seeks its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context" (p.399). The translator has used the technique of thick translation while describing the words, such as,

*bhai, Gopiji* and *mit ama*. In fact, such skills try to find an adequate meaning of words and sentences. In other words, perfect translation is like a myth, for there are no definite phrasal verbs and words in two cultural and linguistic locales. Consequently, it enhances comparative comprehension of readers.

There is no doubt that the creative ego of the translator has brought the atmosphere of hefty implications and practices of biculturalism and multiculturalism, since it reflects the "zone of occult instability" (Bhabha, 1995, p. 156). That's why the global world has become a single pot, which seems like a vast melting pot because various cultures and languages are put there and multiple voices also co-exist with each-other. The melting pot is particularly used to describe the assimilation of various castes, ethnics, nations and regional communities. So, translation is also enhancing the metaphoric prudence of a socio-cultural mosaic or salad bowl. It has dismantled the purity of monolingualism and monoculturalism, as cultural diversity and differences are common in their fusion. Relying on the practice of the bicultural and hybrid state, Bhabha (1995) points out, "When we understand that all cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation, that we begin to understand why hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or 'purity' of cultures are untenable" (p. 156). After reading the translated novel in question, we can figure out that artistic perception of translation has brought the situation of such ambivalence that neither the SL has kept the purity of culture nor the TL has maintained the originality of its own. In reality, both SL and TL have something missing and something gaining.

## 6. Conclusion

In a nutshell, Bhattarai's translated creative work reveals how the translating enterprise enhances the identity of representative creation of Nepali-English writing. From the perspective of reader response, we can scrutinize equivalent problems between two languages and cultures. It is because translating process only provides an approximate translation. At this moment, Newmark (2010) also opines that the translator needs deliberately

deviation, but “normal deviation should be distinguished from creative deviation” (p.66). Moreover, creative deviation is an essential skill for this course of translating. Meanwhile, intentionally or unintentionally, the translator expresses the national and regional sentiment that promotes the following two facets: firstly, it may be the enrichment of the Englishes from the linguistic and cultural perspective. The reason is that there is no purity of traditional perception of English, particularly British and American English. Secondly, the production and reproduction of the creative act of the translating has the possibilities of enhancing Nepali-English writing or the Third World Literature and texts as well as the literature in English. Such an inspiration is instrumental in transferring knowledge from boundary of Nepali region to English global world. It has also revealed how modern Nepali education has suffered from the ambivalence of the Eastern tradition and the Western education system. Despite the philosophical guidance of Sukarat, Ananta becomes the victim of the self-destruction. It reveals that both professors and university students are failures in the ambivalent system of Nepali education, because such troubles are also the outcome of the political regression and Maoist insurgency. Moreover, reading the translated work also provides the idea of how the translator is tussling for equivalence and ambivalence of bicultural states while selecting the word, phrasal verb and socio-cultural context. Reader response therefore portrays that creative deviation of the translating task finds itself in the gain and loss situation.

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The author: Megh Prasad Kharel is a PhD scholar at Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University. He is a recipient of the University Grants Commission (Nepal) PhD Fellowship and Research Support Grant 2074-75 B.S.

Reading as a skill is the key to an educated workforce, which in turn is the bedrock of economic advancement, particularly in the present technological age. Studies have shown that by increasing the literacy and numeracy skills of primary school children in the UK, the benefit to the economy generally is in billions of pounds. The skill of reading is now no more just an intellectual or leisure activity, but rather a fully-fledged economic force. Part of the problem with reading is that it is a skill which is not appreciated in most developed societies. This is an attitude that has condemned These are recommendation lists which contains Accumulate Experience by Reading Books. You should give them a visit if you're looking for similar novels to read. Alternatively, you can also create your own list. N/A. The only real problem I'd have is with the translations which would definitely benefit from some editing because the flow of the story gets a bit wonky at times since the more>> syntax is probably going to be a bit awkward for people who are comfortable with English and the diction is also a bit questionable. Other than needing to get used to the translations, the novel has a pretty good start. <