

**Ramnarayan V. Pathak's Literary Criticism in Translation****Manisha Gosai***Assistant Professor of English, Govt. Engineering College, Bhuj, (Gujarat) India***Abstract**

Ramnarayan V. Pathak, apart from his creative effulgence, also emerges as one notable reflective critical mind of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. His writings bear historical and critical significance in the contexts of Gujarati as well as pan Indian language literatures. His prodigious volume of work pertains to varied domains such as creative writing, literary criticism, literary history, translation, prosody, epistemology, and aesthetics among others. This variety of subjects and his ingenious critical acumen not only invite translational deliberations for Pathak's precious little appearance in Indian English academia, but they also pose questions of nature of and methods for translation. Pathak's creative and critical orientation cause strategic deviation in his register, tenor, content and execution in sync with nature of his discourse (historical, formalistic study, philosophical, social, political, aesthetic etc.), form of discourse (critical essay, review, radio talk, key-note address to seminars, etc), audience (informed audience, general readers, students, academics, etc.), subject matter (study of poetic meters, Indian *Darshana* theories of knowledge, practical criticism of writers like Narmad, Tagore among others). Translating Pathak's writings in English amounts to revaluing, interpreting, adapting and deploying popularly discussed and practiced translation theories in indigenous discursal context. This paper intends to study translatorial perspectives on critical writings of RV Pathak in terms of theory and practice.

**Key Words:** Literary Criticism, effulgence, epistemology**Introduction**

Ramnarayan Vishwanath Pathak was few amongst his literary contemporaries who held the opinion that the study of Gujarati literary theory and criticism need not subscribe to the non-native models without recognizing its full consequences. Pathak worked during the Gandhian Era and after when the zeal for progressive reforms and modernization was morphing India in to the model of an egalitarian socialist democracy. It was considered progressive to evaluate Gujarati literary concepts, forms, terms etc. in the light of European literary theory and criticism. His contemporary writers Vijayraj

Vaidhya, Vishwanath Bhatt and Vishnuprasad Trivedi were favourably inclined to Western literary theory and criticism. Their efforts were oriented more toward making their literary criticism aesthetic. Ramnarayan on the other hand constructed criticism as a '*shastriya vimarsha*' (technical discourse) and so made no conscious efforts to avail his readers with the relishing flare for style or structure. He believed that Gujarati literature and criticism should be evaluated keeping in view principles of Sanskrit poetics, linguistics, prosody and grammar as all Indian bhasha-s stem from Sanskrit. It could be said that

modernity for Pathak meant seeing relevance and meaning of contemporary literature and criticism in terms of the source culture of knowledge. For this perception he was thought to be an insurgent who simply refused to look beyond the Indian shores or worse for that matter beyond the borders of the state of Gujarat. Pathak's enthusiasm for reviving and popularizing native poetic, narrative and critical traditions was anathema to many votaries of so called progressive value systems imported from the rest of the world and perhaps which is why not even today does one find his voice in the mainstream Gujarati academia.

### RV Pathak's Literary Criticism

Translating Pathak's critical corpus is a daunting task. The reason lies in his versatile genius in that his criticism often draws its arguments from technical subjects like grammar, prosody, language philosophy, rhetoric. Moreover, he commands fair knowhow of both Indian and Western critical and poetical traditions. He structures his talk or essay in the compositional customs of Sanskrit theorists, that is, the discourse unfolds with as many of the constituents as follows: exposition of the subject (*visaya*), antithetical view (*shamka*) or antecedent view (*purva-paksha*), thesis to be established (*uttara-paksa*), illustration (*udaharana*), resorting to principle (*siddhanta*), and conclusion (*nirnaya*). In the process, Sanskrit poetical theories provide a larger ambit to interpret a text or literary concept at hand. *Tout court*, a translator experiences a polysystemic discourse layered with intertextual nuances of meaning in disarmingly simple pronouncements. In contrast to this usual disposition, his

writings occasionally involve terminology or obsolete terms without reducing meaning to populist sentiment. Pathak's literary criticism strikes a fine balance between classicist and populist traditions. He retains the classicist zeal for minute interpretation, scores of examples to validate the argument, strategies to rebut or refute the adversarial positions and yet renders the discourse in a way that even a layman could access the gist of it. His critical positions are basically informed of his insights into Sanskrit and Western literary theories. One may elicit basic tenets as follows that form an overarching framework for understanding his overall take on critical enterprise:

- Depiction of human feelings more important than pure natural description
- Poetry should communicate feelings chiefly
- In order to communicate feelings, the poet should maintain an objective distance and not get carried away
- Poetry should not be affected by the excess of thought or emotion as sentimentality thwarts reason and too much of restraints or disinterestedness weakens feelings
- In order for an emotion to get manifest in its true form, the poet needs *Pratibha* (poetic genius)
- The poetic genius automatically ushers in the required quantum of dispassion.
- Human consciousness does not accept external facts as they are. According as the need of the person's inner disposition and want, he either adds to

or subtracts from the experience of the external world.

- Human consciousness is not any passive material that forms itself after phenomenal events take place. It, rather, proactively responds to the external occurrences and forms certain tendencies and perceptions towards them. When a tendency forms itself in response to a thing or other tendency, he calls it feeling.

Besides this, Pathak's contemplations about pragmatic role of literature in society take into account historical as well as concurrent contexts. Pathak's talks on influence of Indian Independence on literature, influence of Sanskrit on Gujarati poetry, influence of Gandhi on Gujarati literary movements are located in the specificities of historical time and space where he puts forward his critique of given tradition. A translator needs to look into these cultural and academic events of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Gujarat which were once so liminal that the critic in Pathak deemed fit to respond to them. What makes it intriguing is that in most such assessments, Pathak held such views that people often found them radical or just some private whims of an educated mind.

Pathak often spoke and wrote about things which were at odds with popularly held beliefs of his time. For instance, in his talk on influence of Independence on Indian writings, Pathak argues and uses evidences in support that the phenomenon of freedom actually did not succeed as well as Gandhi had expected of it, for gaining freedom politically did not happen to bring out moral uplift in the general character of Indian self.

And neither did Freedom movement find a telling presence across Indian literature in a way similar to the presence of World War II did in the Western literary history. Pathak would certainly not have been liked by many idealists of his time for such cynicism just after the buoyant Independence of India. However, his disbelief with the grand narrative of Indian Independence reflected in his references to corruption in public life, poverty, illiteracy, bureaucratic redtapism, continuation of colonial governance system, academic dishonesty in downplaying one's indigenous knowledge traditions and relying on and propagating dubious accounts of socio-literary past. This particular essay is historical in its content and speculative in its intent. The overall tone of the message, references used, suggestions offered, follies highlighted, style of delivery executed are all nuanced with a critical sense that rejects the grand narrative of Indian independence.

He believed that the function of criticism was to facilitate an intellectual culture wherein different literatures and their forms would flourish. His writings always stressed the need of creating such a culture.

### **Strategies for Translation**

Translating criticism poses a different set of challenges and interpretive methods than creative writing. Critical writing can be said to be as much creative as any other. Both creative and critical modes of thinking are acts of interpretation albeit with a difference. That is, criticism does not allow its writer/translator the 'poetic license' to articulate or signify. Critic's purpose in communication differs from the creative writer, as the former appeals to reason first

and relish later. Pathak worked impressively as a poet, storyteller, critic, and translator, wielding different compositional patterns in his writings. Translation of his one facet of writing needs to take note of his other literary selves. For often his prose assumes poetic qualities, poetry meandering through music and rhetoric, or criticism sporting subtle qualities of narratives. This fluid nature of his writing makes its decoding a very complex process. He could be simple in syntax and nonaggressive in tone yet highly critical of an idea or practice. For instance, he responds to a debate going on in Gujarati literature in his time that concerned itself with the issue of 'geyata' (singability) or 'ageyata' (non-singability) in Gujarati poetry.

Pathak held that this dichotomy was essentially Western in its origin, for in Sanskrit culture, poetry was unmistakably amenable to be set to music. In that respect everything in Sanskrit can be set to music. One may cite *Maheshvar Sutras* in support of this argument. Of all the languages of the world, perhaps *Maheshvar Sutra* alone is such unique arrangement of basic alphabets that is 'singable' as chanting. However, the distinction among 'prose', 'poetry', and 'song' is starkly etched out in Western prosodic traditions. In the West, moreover, poetry is to be recited, not sung, or it could be prosaic too. This model of formalistic evaluation of poetry, however, was endorsed

by Narmad and BK Thakor and other critics of his time. Pathak dismisses this extrapolation of idea without being dismissive of its participants. His tone and rigour for explication remains committed to the subject which does not dither in its course. Here, translation needs to be sensitive to interpretations implied by Pathak with respect to content, context and form of argument. It also requires one to acquaint with the critical postulates of antecedent and contemporary critical debates that often supply useful references and contexts.

Pathak, the critic, remained chaste to validity of content and formal register necessary for it. On examining Pathak's critical writing, one finds that his arguments follow a specific line of development. His critical posits are built gradually and structured like a narrative. Translation of his criticism assumes dialogic nature where the ideas unfold in a real or hypothetical discussion either addressing its immediate audience or the implied reader.

There are specific concerns in critical writings of Pathak that need to be attended to for the translation. As his writings meander through a wider spectrum of literary, critical, and social subject matters, the following eight categories encompass some concerns for translating his critical writings.

Language	Simple, direct, polemical, and technical where required
Content	From both classical and popular debates; practical criticism; principles of literary theories, reviews, social issues, etc.
Conceptual categories	Technical terms from native disciplines of knowledge are retained in his criticism as they are to be interpreted in their

	source frameworks
Historicity	References and responses made to specific historical events, texts, literary or social figures; they provide with needful contexts to decode his critical positions
Composition	Narrative mode, dialogic, illustrative
Inter-textuality	Illustrations, examples, references made to other texts in Sanskrit or Gujarati
Discoursal Interrelations	conceptual categories are drawn from multiple source disciplines such as <i>Nyaya</i> (logic) <i>praman-vidya</i> (theories of valid knowledge), Darshana-s, poetics, prosody, rhetoric, grammar, linguistics, etc. which supply with logical frameworks for decoding meaning
Comparative analysis	Literary movements, -isms, terms from Western poetics interpreted <i>viz-à-viz</i> Sanskrit ones. What is intended therein is to examine the rationale of western posits, their logical validity, and appropriateness of their application on local literary creativity

Pathak's critical writings stand out in myriad ways. He dared question in his time those popular academic practices and philosophies which were, in fact, extension of the colonial hegemony in disguise of modernity. While refuting the uncritical academic beliefs and proposing his perspectives, Pathak's

moderate and non-aggressive methods attempted to decolonize Gujarati literary criticism. Through translations, perhaps, one may contribute by critically appreciating his works for raising fundamental and questions that help us understand literature and criticism from multiple vantage points.

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